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**PERCEPTIONS OF TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND
LEGISLATORS REGARDING STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY
SUPERINTENDENTS TO INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF
EDUCATIONAL POLICIES**

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EDUCATIONAL POLICIES**

by

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Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Kelly Nerada Bonewald, and our two children, Sydney Reese and Grayson Daniel, with whom we are blessed to share our lives. Kelly, I am especially thankful for the strength you have provided our family during this challenging chapter of our lives. Sydney and Grayson, the joy you bring me and the hopes I have for your futures inspire me to be better than I am. You have each sacrificed to allow me to realize this personal dream, and I am grateful for the love and support you have given me throughout this journey. I love you with all my heart.

Acknowledgements

I have been blessed with an amazing support system throughout my life. In particular, I have experienced significant assistance during these last three years of doctoral work which culminate with the publication of this treatise. This journey would not have been a success without the help of family, professional colleagues, and the mentors who have touched my life.

I want to thank my mom and dad, Johannah and Jerry Bonewald, for raising me to believe anything was possible if you were willing to work hard and maintain a positive attitude. I also want to thank you, along with my mother and father-in-law, Rosalynn and Daniel Nerada, for all your help with Grayson and Sydney when Kelly and I desperately needed a day just for us during this long road.

As a high school principal, I have a special appreciation for teachers who impact their students' lives in meaningful and lasting ways. Therefore, I want to thank the teachers who were most influential in my prior education. From Hallettsville High School, thank you to Jozelma Brown, who challenged me academically as no one else ever has. Similarly, I thank Melanie Castellow and Lynn Cook for teaching me to let go and to think for myself. The lessons I learned from you three were all I needed to make it in the world of academia. Also, I want to thank Dr. Trini San Miguel for telling me that I “didn’t talk like a coach” and for being a constant supporter as I’ve continued my education.

Balancing the demands of the CSP Program while working as Wimberley High School Principal would have been impossible if not for the aid of so many wonderful

colleagues. To the staff of Wimberley High School, I am so fortunate to work alongside such dedicated professionals, and I greatly appreciate your understanding and encouragement these last three years. This also would not have been possible without the constant support of the WISD Administrative Team and School Board. I am blessed to be part of such a quality district. I want to give special thanks to three ladies. Marilyn Van Hoozer, thank you for always being watchful that I was maintaining balance in my life. Sharon Uhlaender, I can't thank you enough for keeping my head above water every day. You are truly one-of-a-kind. Stephanie Norris, you stepped-up and filled-in for me the many days I was away from campus. I will always be grateful for the sacrifices you made that allowed me to pursue this dream.

To my CSP XXI cohort, I learned so much from each of you that I will take with me and benefit from in my career. Thank you to Chad, Liz, Michelle, Rey, Robert, Ruth, and Toni for sharing this experience with me. I know the futures of our children and the future of public education in Texas are bright with leaders like you on the horizon.

I want to thank the outstanding professors and mentors I have encountered while in the CSP program, including Hortensia Palomares for her patience and superb guidance throughout the treatise process. I would not have navigated this maze without you. I also want to thank Dr. Belinda Pustka. You have been an incredible resource and support to me. The quality of information in this treatise would not have been possible without you, and your consistent encouragement helped me to persist the many times I felt stuck.

Last but not least, I say thanks to my treatise committee members for your support and helpful feedback. Dr. Daly, thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee and for providing a fresh perspective on my work. Dr. Sharpe, thank you for taking a sincere

interest in each of your students' lives and for your constant encouragement. Dr. Pringle, thank you for being a mentor to me long before I joined the CSP. Your guidance and encouragement are major reasons I am earning this degree. Dr. Ovando, thank you for taking me under your wing and being so giving of your time to assist me in creating a quality product. My road to graduation would have been so much bumpier without you. Finally, Dr. Olivarez, I thank you for seeing potential in me and for providing me with access to this life changing opportunity that is the CSP program. You have been a guiding force for me and my fellow cohort members. With the leadership skills and wisdom you have so generously shared with us, we will "Charge on!" and see to it that "What starts here changes the world".

**PERCEPTIONS OF TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND
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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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The purpose of this study was to identify perceptions of superintendents and legislators regarding strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

- 1) How do Texas superintendents perceive they influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?
- 2) How do Texas legislators perceive Texas superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?
- 3) What commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators in regard to how superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

A qualitative methodology and a grounded theory approach were utilized in this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data was collected via in-depth interviews with three purposely selected Texas public school superintendents and three Texas legislators. The data were coded and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding techniques (Patton, 2002). This method of data analysis allowed for themes to emerge from the data and for

the identification of a single overarching theme by which all other themes were connected.

This study's findings uncovered that superintendents influence the development of educational policies at the state level by interacting with legislators and their staff members, by participating as members of professional organizations, and by enlisting local stakeholders. Ingrained in each of these processes for influencing policy development is the overarching theme that superintendents must build and foster relationships to influence the development of educational policies. Based on a thorough examination of the data gathered in this study, implications for practice were offered and recommendations for consideration of future studies that build upon this research were provided.

This study is one of the only research endeavors ever conducted to examine the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. It is the only study of its kind known to the researcher that utilizes qualitative methodology. The richness of the data provided by the participants of this study adds significant value to the knowledge base regarding the political role of the public school superintendent to influence policy development.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the mid 1960's, a state legislator was quoted as saying, "Education is a local thing; we don't have anything to do with that; there's a formula" (Rosenthal & Fuhrman, 1981, p. 5). State legislators' roles in the development of education policies have changed immensely since these words were spoken. Today, the state and federal governments are driving forces behind policy changes that impact local school districts across the country. Conley (2003) stated in discussing the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, "in one fell swoop, the American educational system became federalized to an unprecedented degree" (p. 28). As a result, the high level of local autonomy that school districts once enjoyed has been significantly diminished. Similarly, Sell (2005) noted that the last 50 years has seen a decisive loss of policy-making power for local school boards as state and federal governments have usurped their governing authority. This increased governmental influence in education continues today. For instance, Texas has recently adopted more rigorous expectations for student achievement by implementing the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) testing system. Furthermore, the Obama administration's development of the Race to the Top initiative provides monetary rewards to states willing to agree to the federal government's recommended Common Core Standards for school curriculum.

Because trust in local school districts has diminished, "governors and legislatures have emerged as the key players in education reform" (Conley, 2003, p. 126). Decisions made by lawmakers have mandated changes to many aspects of local school district policy, including the areas of student assessment, school district accountability, provision of services for students with special needs, and methods for funding school operations.

While increased legislative involvement has impacted many stakeholders within local school systems, including local school board members, teachers, students, and parents, perhaps most affected by this shift in government reach has been the school district superintendent.

The fact that school leaders' responsibilities are intertwined with politics is not a new phenomenon. For instance, Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) stated:

The slogan 'Keep politics out of education' rests upon a narrow definition of politics, confined to two party conflicts only. Such a definition is appropriate to the purposes of slogan-makers and users, but too narrow for students or researchers of educational organizations. It is too narrow for the school superintendent as well. (p. 13).

Yet, while politics have previously influenced education, superintendents have found the political dimension of their position has intensified as state governments have taken a more prescriptive role in the operation of public schools. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) classify school districts as political organizations despite the fact that educators and citizens have traditionally considered the mingling of education and politics to be inappropriate. "The superintendency is definitely a position that is more challenged than in past decades. The sum of these challenges has been an increase in superintendent stress levels, a pressure cooker job situation, and many vacancies in districts" (Glass et al., 2000, p. 85).

Previous researchers argue that increasing scarcity of resources and demand for social services in public education create a battle of competing interests that necessitate political behavior on the part of local school leaders (Rowan and Miskel, 1999).

Unfortunately, prior scholarly research lacks a focus on the superintendent as a central political figure connecting the local school district with the development of legislation at

the state level (Bjork & Lindle, 2001). Therefore, this study centered on the interaction of superintendents with state-level policymakers for the purpose of influencing the development of educational policies. This introductory chapter includes the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, definitions of terms, limitations, delimitations, assumptions of the study, and the significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

As state governments have expanded statutory requirements impacting the creation of educational policies in areas previously considered under the auspices of local school districts, such as school funding, curriculum development, and assessment practices, superintendent and school board decision making authority has eroded (Netusil & Dunkin, 1974; Bennett, Heller & Weldon, 1990; Andero, 2001; Glass et al., 2000; Fuller, Campbell, Celio & Harvey, 2003). Similarly, legislation has restricted local school district leaders' abilities to increase revenues by requiring local voter approval of tax increases, created a more prescribed curriculum in all grade levels, increased the amount and rigor of standardized testing that schools must administer to their students, and now holds schools to a higher level of accountability for the academic achievement of students with special needs and students who lack proficiency in the English language. Andero (2001) and Sell (2005) note that these policies have influenced the involvement of the superintendent, teachers, and School Board in determining what is taught in their local communities. Sell claims that diminished local authority has frustrated parents because their elected School Board representatives no longer have the autonomy to influence curricular decisions, which in essence lessens the power of the parents'

involvement in their children's educations as well. As a result, these governmental mandates have complicated what was already a challenging leadership position for the school district's chief executive. Kowalski and Keedy (2003) point out that the role of public school superintendent has long been political in nature, but they assert that the need for today's superintendent to act in a political manner has dramatically increased. They further observe that as legislative decisions that affect local school districts continue to rise, it is imperative that superintendents ensure their voices are clearly communicated to state representatives. Superintendents who develop relationships with legislators increase their opportunities to have their voices heard. Pustka (2012) describes the importance of superintendents establishing rapport with legislators and their staff members in order to educate them regarding school districts' concerns. In sharing their views with legislators, superintendents could potentially empower local school districts and regain some of their previously held autonomy by becoming more active participants in shaping the development of educational policy adopted at the state level.

Previous studies have sought to better understand the political role of the superintendent. For instance, Moore (1970) attempted to understand how Colorado superintendents could become more effective in their political role concerning state level educational decisions. Later, Billy (1978) investigated the political acts of Minnesota superintendents as they interacted with legislators, their State Board of Education, and Commissioner of Education. In 1982, Robison studied the political activity of Texas public school superintendents at the public school system, community, and state levels. Allen (1985) has researched characteristics of Michigan superintendents affecting their level of participation in the political process, and Chojnacki (1992) has examined

lobbying strategies of superintendents in Ohio. In addition, Nelson (1994) analyzed information sources for legislators on school issues in Mid-Western states.

More recently, Bjork and Lindle (2001) explored the relationship between the political role of the superintendent and interest group politics while Orr (2006) probed the challenges of the superintendency, including political aspects, as the job expectations have evolved. Maldonado (2007) conducted a contemporary analysis to identify the political activity of Texas school superintendents and their perceptions of their effectiveness. Each of these studies has concluded that superintendents need to interact with legislators in regard to education policy. In addition, some studies have focused directly on strategies employed by superintendents in working with legislators; however, they report results through the use of quantitative designs. Prior research has not utilized qualitative methods to provide an in-depth description of strategies utilized by superintendents when influencing the development of educational policies. For instance, Chojnacki (1992) and Maldonado (2007) acknowledge the lack of qualitative investigations designed to understand the superintendent's political role, which they both identify as a shortcoming in the research literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to identify perceptions of superintendents and legislators regarding strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. This research attempted to uncover the views of superintendents and legislators regarding the tactics employed by superintendents, including aspects such as the timing and mode of communication utilized by superintendents when contacting

lawmakers and the superintendent's reliance on individuals, groups, and organizations to provide influence in support of the policy agenda favored by the superintendent. The perceptions gathered from superintendents and lawmakers were compared to determine commonalities and differences.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the research process:

1. How do Texas superintendents perceive they influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?
2. How do Texas legislators perceive Texas superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?
3. What commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators in regard to how superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

Brief Overview of Methodology

In an effort to describe the perceptions of superintendents and legislators, a qualitative methodology was employed with an interpretivist analytical paradigm. Interpretivist researchers attempt to determine meaning by understanding the whole, providing a greater depth of comprehension of the complexity of a phenomena being studied. The ontology of an interpretivist is relativism, recognizing that knowledge is relative to the observer and determined by the observer's experiences, social background, and other factors that influence the observer (Willis, 2007). The epistemology of

interpretivists is subjective, defining knowledge as socially constructed, based on the perceptions of the individual, and acknowledging that there are multiple realities that can differ across place and time (Willis, 2007).

Further, this investigation utilized grounded theory to construct a framework to describe the strategies superintendents utilize when influencing the development of educational policies. Participants were purposefully selected and included three Texas superintendents and three Texas legislators. Data was gathered through one-on-one interviews with participants. The qualitative data was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding methods (Patton, 2002).

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions of terms apply throughout this study:

1. Advocacy

“persuading people who matter to care about your issue” (Daly, 2011, p. 15).

2. Constituent

“any resident of a legislator’s district” (Nelson, 1994, p. 6)

3. Educational policy

state legislation that affects public schools in any manner

4. Educator

“any person involved with the education of students in public schools, including administrators, support services personnel, and classroom teachers” (Nelson, 1994, p. 7).

5. Lobbying

“the practice of attempting to influence the decisions of state legislators”

(Maldonado, 2007 p. 9).

6. Political activity

“recruiting, supporting a candidate, and advocating for educational policy”

(Maldonado p. 9).

7. State legislator

“one who gives or makes laws: a state senator or state representative”

(Nelson, 1994, p. 8).

8. Superintendent

chief executive of a school district in Texas

Delimitations

This study focused exclusively on the perceptions of three superintendents and three state legislators in Texas in regard to the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence legislators in the development of educational policies. The perceptions of all other superintendents and legislators, along with all other stakeholders in public education, were not taken into account. The analysis of strategies employed by superintendents focused solely on the chief executive’s use of those strategies specifically intended to influence the development of educational policies.

Limitations

This qualitative study included the perceptions obtained from a small sample of superintendents and legislators in Texas, therefore, generalization of findings is limited.

This study was also limited by time due to the researcher's intent to complete the superintendent and legislator interviews over a period of four months. Furthermore, the use of a qualitative design may also be affected by the subjectivity of the researcher, which may have created bias when analyzing data gathered in the study (Hatch, 2002).

Assumptions

There were assumptions made in this study. It was assumed that the superintendents in Texas public schools interact with their state legislators. It was also assumed that at least three Texas superintendents and legislators would agree to be interviewed by the researcher. It was further assumed that accurate and honest responses would be provided by the superintendents and legislators that participated in this study. The assumption was made that the researcher would conduct this study in an objective manner to the greatest extent possible given the understanding that researcher bias is inherently a concern in qualitative research. Lastly, it was assumed that the researcher would be cognizant of instances when bias could not be put aside and would identify these occurrences accordingly.

Significance of the Study

This study is one attempt to identify the perceptions of superintendents and legislators regarding the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies, and it may generate relevant information. For instance, the findings may add to the body of research regarding the political role of the superintendent in influencing the development of educational policy. Results of this

study could be utilized by superintendents to enhance their political leadership capacity and improve their effectiveness as advocates for their local school districts. In addition, this study provides information that can be utilized by superintendent preparation programs to enhance the development of aspiring superintendents' political competencies and their understanding of the political nature of the superintendency.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of a study that examined the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators in regard to strategies utilized by superintendents when attempting to influence state legislators during the development of educational policies. This introductory chapter contained the statement of the problem, the purpose for the study, the research questions, methodology, delimitations, limitations, assumptions, and the significance of the study. In Chapter Two, an analysis of relevant literature is provided that details the historical background of the superintendency, examines prior research, and identifies gaps in the existing literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The major focus of this study was on Texas superintendent and legislator perceptions of strategies employed by superintendents to influence legislators in the development of educational policies. This chapter is organized into five sections. The first section of the literature review provides an historical overview of the development of the superintendency in American public education. The second section covers conceptualizations of the role of the superintendent today and also reviews previous research relevant to the political role of the superintendent. The third section addresses the roles that state legislators play in the development of educational policies in Texas as well as influences that have been found to impact legislators' policy decisions. The fourth section focuses on previous models that attempt to explain the political process of influencing legislation, both in general and specific to the role of the superintendent. The final section highlights the gap in the research that provides the focus for this inquiry.

Historical Development of the Superintendency

The expectations of the American public concerning the role of the superintendent have transformed since the role's origination in the mid 19th century. The public requires educators to produce students equipped to meet the demands of an ever-changing society. Callahan (1966) utilized a discursive analysis of writings on the school superintendency spanning from 1865 to 1965 to describe this historical evolution of the superintendency and concluded that four conceptualizations of the superintendent (as teacher-scholar, business manager, statesman, and applied scientist) emerged during this 100 year span. Later, Cuban (1976) noted that as a particular conceptualization became more prominent,

the previous role and responsibilities did not become irrelevant. Therefore, as the superintendency has evolved, it has also become more complex. Two decades after Callahan's analysis, America transitioned from a manufacturing-based economy to an information-based system (Drucker, 1999). Kowalski (2005) studied the effects of this shift to the Information Age and suggested that a fifth conceptualization of the superintendency had evolved, which he termed the superintendent as communicator.

Superintendent as Teacher-Scholar

According to Callahan (1966), the position of school superintendent originated in American public schools in the mid 1800s. Large cities were the first to see the need for the position and thus appointed an individual to oversee daily operations of the schools in their districts. During this time, the superintendent was focused on supervising teachers, ensuring orderly operations of schools, and implementing curriculum (Kowalski, 1999). These early superintendents were also instrumental in establishing expectations for ethical and professional practices in the education profession. Superintendents were responsible for executing school district policies enacted by their local school boards while also attempting to lead the employees of their district. However, these two roles were at times at odds with one another, thus requiring the superintendent to become politically savvy (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs & Thurston, 1999).

From 1865-1910, the main responsibility of superintendents was considered to be that of teacher to the classroom teachers. Their professional interactions outside the school district were predominantly with fellow educators while attending education conferences or through the writing of journal articles (Callahan, 1966). Callahan reports

that the superintendency was considered to be a profession that operated outside the realm of politics. However, Cuban (1976) and Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) note that superintendent self-reports and other research revealed that the responsibilities of the job required the superintendent to act in a political manner.

Superintendent as Business Manager

The superintendent's role changed during the early 20th century. Schools were receiving criticism for being inefficient and ineffective, and superintendents responded by adopting an organizational structure that emulated industrial practices. The superintendent began to be seen as a manager whose functions were "authoritative, impersonal, and task-oriented", falling in line with the predominant view of scientific management at that time which was distrusting of "bottom-up and lateral communication" (Kowalski & Keedy, 2005, p. 209). Brunner, Grogan, and Bjork also concur that "many attempted to apply Frederick Taylor's concept of scientific management to the educational enterprise as a solution to their problems" (2002, p. 218). The vision of superintendents as managers was dominant for approximately 30 years. Burroughs (1974) and Tyack (1972) see the superintendents of this era as political realists who utilized their intelligence to respond to the social conditions of their time. However, Thomas and Moran (1992) view superintendents of this era in a different lens. They assert that superintendents used the prevalent scientific management theory as a tool to expand and protect their authority.

Superintendent as Statesman

The idea of the superintendent as statesman gained popularity in the 1930's as scholars focused on the importance of human relations in organizational success (Willower & Forsyth, 1999). Melby (1955) stated the role of superintendents was heavily influenced by the ideal of democratic administration. The community was viewed as the greatest resource for schools, and it became the task of the superintendent to lead in a manner that would "release the creative talents of others" and "mobilize the educational resources of the community" (Melby, 1955, p. 250). Kowalski (2005) explained that this was a time of scarce resources for public education, and he viewed this period as a time when the superintendent needed to use the political skills of a statesman to secure the necessary support to ensure the successful operation of the school district.

Superintendent as Social Scientist

Callahan (1966) described another shift in the focus of the superintendent from the role as statesman to the emerging conception of social scientist. The superintendent as democratic leader had begun to be viewed as too idealist for the economic and political challenges of society. Kowalski (2005) noted that this time period was marked by growing public suspicion and impatience in regard to democratic leadership approaches. Brunner et al. (2002) noted that fears stemming from the Cold War created doubts that public education could meet the challenges necessary to ensure America's national security needs were satisfied. Superintendents were then expected to serve as School Board advisors, managers of district resources, and the chief communicator to the public. Student achievement began to decline in comparison to other nations and the Soviet

Union successfully launched Sputnik into orbit, which further strengthened the notion that American students and society were falling behind. They assert that this dynamic forced superintendents to become apologists for public education, yet they also claim the unrest required superintendents to become stronger leaders as well.

At the same time, changes in American law were leading to the desegregation of schools, adding further stress to the challenges of school systems. The role of the superintendent was expanding with these new societal expectations. “Superintendents were to be responsible for such functions as planning and evaluation; organization; management of personnel, business, buildings, auxiliary services, provision of information and advice to the community; and coordination of the entire school system” (Brunner et al, 2002, p. 221). Preparation programs were altered to better equip superintendents to meet these new expectations. Superintendents began to take courses in the behavioral sciences that were believed to aid in analysis of individual and group behavior (Kowalski, 1999). Superintendents were expected to utilize theory to predict the effects of their decisions and develop the skills to communicate their decision making to school district personnel and the public.

New challenges arose for superintendents during the 1960’s as communities began to view schools as insensitive to their needs. According to Standerfer (2006), this time period was the birth of accountability standards in public education as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965. A focus was placed on ensuring that all students were learning as funds were being allocated to school districts from the federal government intended to help schools meet the needs of students who were economically disadvantaged. With these new expectations, the superintendent

duties included management of the district, teacher professional development, communication with the community and special interest groups, and ensuring that legislative mandates were enacted to reduce the achievement gap between students.

Increased involvement of the federal government continued in the 1970's as special education legislation was passed. Standerfer (2006) asserted that the increasing expectations for public education to make-up for societal inequities during the 1960's and 1970's increased the political role of the superintendent while job security decreased. The position became even more difficult with the advent of school reform movements of the 1980's, many of which were spurred by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Brunner, et al., 2002). Brunner et al. (2002) claimed that superintendents were identified as the culprits responsible for unsuccessful school reforms. A sharp focus shifted to measuring student learning and ensuring teacher professionalism. As a result, the superintendent needed to know how to improve student learning and at the same time was expected to distribute leadership that was previously held predominantly by the superintendent. In addition, the public also expected the superintendent to generate community support for schools and yield to demands generated at the federal and state levels.

Superintendent as Communicator

Reform efforts that occurred following Callahan's (1966) extensive study have created the need for a fifth conceptualization of the superintendency, that of effective communicator (Kowalski, 2005). Kowalski, Petersen, and Fusarelli (2007) point out that criticism began to mount during the 1990's as the coercive approach of state and federal

accountability measures did not produce the intended results of raising student achievement to levels initially intended. Policymakers in many states adjusted their approach because of pressures from local school districts and the general public by adopting a popular business approach known as directed autonomy. In doing so, the previous mandates remained and were accompanied by new, broad achievement goals. Local school districts were given more autonomy in their strategies employed to meet those goals, and they were held accountable for their students' results. With this change in approach, many superintendents realized that their role in school reform had been altered and expanded. They were now responsible for identifying systems that needed to be changed to support student achievement and also to determine how those changes would be implemented (Kowalski, Peterson, Young & Ellerson, 2011).

However, the challenges were so extensive that superintendents could not bring about the necessary systemic changes alone. Today's school leader must collaborate with numerous stakeholders, including school employees, students, parents, local citizens and the business community, and local and state governmental officials to facilitate school improvement (Bjork, 2001). To successfully work with diverse stakeholders, superintendents need to establish and maintain positive relationships (Kowalski et al., 2007). Further, Kowalski et al. (2011) noted that this focus on relationships as a communication strategy contrasted with the traditional role of top-down organizational communication that superintendents were previously accustomed to utilizing.

The federal government furthered its involvement in public education with the reauthorization of the ESEA act of 1965 in the form of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. Schools were held accountable by the federal government for making Adequate

Yearly Progress (AYP) as determined by several measurements including academic achievement of student sub-populations on state developed assessments, student attendance, and student graduation rates. In Texas, the state government in the 2011-2012 school year officially moved from the previous Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) testing system to the more rigorous State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) testing system. The creation of the new STAAR testing system was due to requirements created by the 80th and 81st Texas legislatures. Lawmakers required the development of a new assessment system intended to increase postsecondary readiness of Texas graduates and enhance their workforce competitiveness when compared to students nationally and internationally (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

According to Kowalski et al., (2011) the raised accountability standards that superintendents and their schools are faced with have been particularly difficult in light of the current national economic condition. States are cutting funding for school districts in response to one of the most severe economic recessions in history, causing superintendents to deal with significant budget limitations. The scenario of reduced funding coupled with increased student achievement expectations brought about by federal and state mandates for local school districts has placed today's superintendent in a difficult situation. As the leaders of public education, superintendents must play a key role in shaping the discussions regarding local, state, and federal policy (Kowalski, 2011).

“Since its founding, the American public education system has experienced multiple reform periods, each reflecting evolving needs, values, and political conditions”

(Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 1). These evolving needs have required superintendents to serve various functions as the leader of the school district, including roles as teacher-scholar, business manager, statesman, social scientist, and communicator. While the importance of these roles has shifted over time based on social conditions, all five conceptualizations remain vital to effective superintendent leadership today (Kowalski et al., 2011). The modern role of the superintendent, with particular emphasis on the political functions of the chief executive's position and prior studies focusing on political facets of the job, will be discussed in further detail in the following section of the literature review.

Roles of the Superintendent Today

The role of the superintendent is very complex and includes administrative, instructional, and political responsibilities (Olivarez, 2010). There are many areas of schooling in which the superintendent must exhibit strong leadership in order to realize student success. Fuller et al. (2003) affirm that:

School superintendents direct highly complex bureaucracies and deal with teachers, unions, students, parents, community organizations, the business community, governing boards, and politicians. Although to the outsider they appear to be in charge, insiders understand that they are pressured by many different interests and rarely control their own agendas (p. 11).

The Texas Administrative Code (2012) identifies standards that must be met to satisfy requirements for licensure as a school superintendent. Included among these expectations are criteria for proficiency in the areas of policy and governance, which address the ability to apply general characteristics of internal and external political systems to the educational organization, to ascertain the political needs of community

groups, to interact with lawmaking bodies on educational issues, and to mobilize community resources to respond to diverse community needs.

Conley (2003) points to standards-based reform movements as the major reason that power has been removed from local school districts and placed in the hands of state and federal policy-makers. This shift in power requires that superintendents be capable leaders in the political spectrum of their job in order to represent the true needs and context of their local environment. Student performance standards are increasingly being used to inform funding and policies, with superintendents and school boards relegated to the role of implementers of state mandates rather than developers of their own locally-directed policies. School leaders express frustration with the limiting nature of some federal and state initiatives that they view as constraining local educators' abilities to address the true needs of their students (Cohn, 2005).

These mandates can particularly hinder leaders of small school districts. Bolla (2010) reports that the size of a school district can impact how much time superintendents are able to spend on their various job duties. She conducted a quantitative research study of 115 Missouri superintendents that utilized a survey instrument to assess the superintendents' perceptions of their roles based on the size of the school district. The amount of time that these school leaders spent on their various obligations was analyzed. Her findings indicated that because rural superintendents have less central office staff, they often spend more time on tasks related to the implementation of state mandates than do superintendents from larger school districts. The emphasis on complying with these mandates can force the chief executives of smaller districts to lose focus on other aspects of their positions such as the educational needs of the district. In the outline of

superintendent leadership detailed below, Johnson provides a useful framework for conceptualizing the three dominant roles of the school district leader.

Johnson's Framework

A framework depicting the three primary roles of the superintendent was proposed by Johnson (1996) based on an in-depth case study analysis of 12 superintendents who were new to their superintendent assignments for a period of two years. Johnson's study spanned from 1989 to 1992. She found that superintendents were most successful when they consistently supported the creation of structures designed for continuous improvement, encouraged collaboration, successfully built coalitions, and were politically astute. Through her research, Johnson determined that superintendent leadership could be organized into three distinct roles: educational leadership, managerial leadership, and political leadership.

Educational leader. As expectations from the state level for school accountability have grown along with demands for evidence of student achievement gains, the focus on the need for the superintendent to serve as the district's educational leader has intensified. Johnson (1996) claims that chief executives of school districts can use their influence to lead schools to change by establishing a vision for that change. Olivarez (2010) further delineates that in order to lead change in school systems, superintendents must first understand the current condition and historical context of the organization, clearly define the goals to be achieved, and develop a plan to attain those goals.

Effective systems of internal and external communication are vital to the success of this process (Yukl, 2010; Olivarez, 2010). Needs assessments must be conducted to clarify aspects of the organization that require change to allow student achievement gains to occur. The superintendent should be inclusive in gathering information regarding previous efforts to bring about change within the district to better understand doubts and hesitations that may be encountered from stakeholders. When implementing educational change in an organization, clear objectives must be established collaboratively and conveyed consistently to all stakeholders through multiple mediums. Furthermore, when creating a plan focused on reaching new goals, the superintendent must allow the opportunity for a variety of stakeholders to share in the development of the plan in order to build ownership for the intended changes within the organization (Yukl, 2010; Olivarez, 2010).

Shifting a school district's culture regarding teaching and learning would be a challenging endeavor if it were the superintendents' sole responsibility. However, when Owen and Ovando (2000) investigated the roles of the superintendent through Johnson's frame, the researchers discovered superintendents face increasing obstacles in fulfilling their roles as educational leaders due to the increasing demands on their time from the managerial and political facets of their job. These findings were further supported by Fuller et al. (2003) in their study of urban superintendents which reported increasing frustrations of superintendents who felt their focus on teaching and learning at the district level was overwhelmed by the managerial and political requirements of their job.

Managerial leader. According to Johnson (1996), the superintendent's role as a managerial leader includes the responsibilities to develop annual budgets, oversee

staffing, and implement policies approved by the local school board or mandated by the legislature. Leaders most effectively perform their managerial role when they encourage individuals to take initiative to creatively solve problems and share both authority and accountability for the success of the organization. A decentralized balance of power must be created throughout a district if schools are going to effectively respond to the diverse needs of their stakeholders. The superintendent is charged with creating and communicating the district's structure for decision-making processes and must do so effectively for a balance of power to be realized (Johnson, 1996).

There are particular acts that superintendents undertake in order to fulfill their managerial roles. Owen and Ovando (2000) incorporate managerial acts previously described by Mintzberg (1973) in creating a framework for the managerial role of the school district chief executive. They claim that superintendents exercise their managerial responsibilities through interpersonal, informational, and decision-making acts.

Attributes identified as necessary for superintendents to carry out interpersonal acts include the ability to supervise, control, coordinate, and represent. School leaders engaged in informational acts exhibit the ability to inform and monitor, while decision-making acts require the capability to analyze and organize, as well as a personality characterized by determination.

Political leader. While the educational and managerial roles of the superintendent are vital, the political role is also critical to the performance of the school leader. The political leadership of superintendents is most often displayed in their work with the school board, local government, constituents, and state lawmakers. Owen and Ovando (2000) developed a model of the superintendent as a political leader based upon data

obtained from in-depth case studies of two superintendents who were considered successful in turning around previously struggling school districts. The purpose of their study was to describe superintendent roles and identify strategies and tactics that were utilized to earn community trust and cooperation.

The model identifies three acts undertaken by superintendents in their political role. These acts are building coalitions, negotiating agreements, and forcing concessions. Attributes identified as helpful in creating coalitions include superintendent visibility throughout the district, communication that is open and honest, people skills, sensitivity to stakeholder values, willingness to empower others, and the ability to unify. Characteristics necessary in the negotiation of agreements are a willingness to listen and to compromise. Superintendents must also have the ability to direct situations and use their positional power when they need to force concessions. Johnson (1996) also addressed the need for the superintendent to be politically astute and claimed that this need grows as the demands for accountability and excellence in schools increases.

Successful political behavior requires the chief executive to possess analytic, strategic, and interpersonal skills to balance the political demands of stakeholders at the local and state levels. Superintendents need to be able to recognize and evaluate interests and opinions of key players and how they are interconnected to navigate the political world and best meet the needs of the school district (Johnson, 1996). Many scholars have addressed the importance of the political role of the superintendent and its apparent rising level of importance in successfully fulfilling the job. Wirt and Christovich (1989) found that almost 70% of superintendents reported their involvement in the political arena had increased since taking on their first superintendency. This increase in prominence

appears to continue as recent research reports indicate that superintendents have elevated the importance of political leadership as a primary function of their job (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Kowalski, 2011). This focus on the political realm may in part be a result of prior findings of Glass et al. (2000) which claim that student success in the classroom can be impacted by the political skills of the superintendent.

While district leaders can attend trainings to become more effective in this aspect of their job, Fuller et al. (2003) assert that experience is vital. Daly (2011) concurs with the notion that advocacy can be a learned skill, explaining that “anyone, at any age, can learn to effectively pitch ideas” (p.19). He identified five key skills necessary for successful advocacy. These attributes included an advocate’s ability to “communicate clearly and memorably”, “build credibility and generate affinity”, “build relationships that let ideas prosper”, “presell their ideas”, and “influence others”.

While at times superintendents need to exert influence, at other times they are on the receiving end of political pressures. Orr (2006) reported that the superintendency has become defined by the need to balance local pressures resulting from district and community members’ desires with increased state accountability pressures to raise student achievement. Marinelli (1996) found through interviews of multiple school stakeholders that educators, including superintendents, appeared to be turning inward, reducing communication with outside entities in response to sharp increases in the level of criticism of public schools. Rather than working to convince legislators that schools needed and deserved their support, he asserted that school leaders had chosen to merely complain to one another about the unfairness of this criticism. Marinelli (1996) asserts that school leaders must reengage in the fight to defend educators and pointed out that

“the best lobbying is always done by those who believe the most in what they are doing” (p. 7). While researchers have identified distinct areas of which superintendents must provide leadership, the remainder of the literature review focuses on aspects related exclusively to the political role of school leaders. To begin, a background of prior research associated with the superintendent as a political leader is detailed.

Studies of the Superintendent as Political Leader

Several studies have been conducted to better understand the political nature of the superintendency. An early study examined the political role of Colorado superintendents in state level educational decision making in order to identify information that would enable school leaders to become more effective in their political role (Moore, 1970). Moore employed a quantitative methodology and utilized a survey instrument that was completed by 64 state legislators and 162 superintendents. The ages and years of experience of participants were not found to have significantly impacted the perceptions of legislators or superintendents. When compared to legislator responses, a significantly larger percentage of superintendents were found to believe the following:

- superintendents needed to increase their political activity to preserve a voice in educational decisions at the local level,
- superintendents possessed a strong understanding of the political process,
- superintendents should ask legislators to appear before large groups to discuss educational policies,
- superintendents should support candidates who favor public education,

- superintendents should attempt to influence the local community concerning educational legislation,
- superintendents should attempt to influence decisions of legislators by threatening to withdraw support for other legislators,
- superintendents should attempt to be instrumental in introducing educational legislation, and
- superintendents should form coalitions with other groups to influence educational legislation (Moore, 1970).

Conversely, a significantly higher percentage of legislators reported the following:

- superintendents do not have a basic understanding of the political climate in Colorado,
- the political actions of superintendents concerning state level educational decisions are often not interpreted by legislators as superintendents intended, and
- superintendent political efforts are frequently ineffective in influencing legislator decisions (Moore, 1970).

A few years after Moore's analysis, the political role of superintendents in Iowa was investigated by Netusil and Dunkin (1974). The researchers conducted a quantitative investigation of the opinions of 58 superintendents and 96 "laypersons" which included mayors, state representatives, PTA presidents, school board presidents, and news editors. They found that superintendents and laypersons believed superintendents did less in their political roles than both groups believed they should. The size of the school district was not found to be a significant determinant of the superintendents' perceptions of their

political roles with legislators. Both groups of participants indicated that superintendents should stay abreast of important educational policy issues, keep their local constituents informed, and remain actively involved with legislators throughout the year.

In the late 1970's, the political involvement of Minnesota superintendents in the state education policy system was studied by Billy (1978) in order to identify and describe superintendents' political interactions with legislators, the Governor's office, the State Board of Education, and the Commissioner of Education. Data was obtained with structured and semi-structured interviews of 26 superintendents representing school districts of various sizes. Findings indicated superintendents attempted to support candidates they considered pro-public education through actions that were not visible to the public, such as campaign contributions and personal encouragement. All but one superintendent reported lobbying their legislators. The one exception conveyed that a government liaison employed by the school district lobbied on behalf of the district. The majority of superintendents expressed ease in reaching their state representatives, with many lawmakers initiating contact with superintendents. Legislators were perceived by superintendents as being very receptive and responsive to superintendent input regarding educational policies.

Shortly following Billy's research, Beavers (1979) replicated Moore's (1970) study by having 111 legislators and 150 superintendents in Mississippi complete the same questionnaire. Beavers' results supported Moore's findings that superintendents understood the political climate differently than legislators. Other findings that supported Moore's previous research included the fact that legislators and superintendents agreed on their perceptions of both the actual role that superintendents had assumed to promote

educational legislation as well as the ideal role that superintendents should take in promoting educational legislation.

Similar to Billy's prior research, Robison (1982) performed an analysis of Texas public school superintendents' perceptions of their actual and desired degree of political activity. Her research was however not solely focused at the state level, as she included the public school system and community levels as well. A second purpose of Robison's inquiry was to determine whether superintendent perceptions were related to school district size. Questionnaires in this quantitative study were completed by 420 superintendents representing large, medium, and small school districts. Results showed superintendents across all district enrollments desired to become more active in state-level decision making. High levels of actual and desired political activity were noted across all three district sizes. Political activity of superintendents was found to increase moderately as district size increased.

When compared to prior studies, Allen (1985) provided a new angle to research concerning the political role of superintendents. He examined the relationship between Michigan superintendents' characteristics and their degree of political participation with the state legislature. A survey of 226 superintendents was utilized in the quantitative study. Allen found that superintendents in metropolitan areas had higher participation rates than non-metropolitan school leaders. Superintendent participation in the political process increased as school district size increased. This finding supported Robison's (1982) prior results in Texas. Allen also discovered that superintendents with doctoral degrees engaged in the political process more often than those with a master's degree. Superintendents with doctorates believed campaign participation was the most effective

method of influencing educational policy while those with master's degrees identified voting as the best strategy of influence. Establishing long-term relationships with legislators was viewed as the most effective strategy for political participation across all superintendent categories.

At the same time that Allen was investigating the effects of superintendent characteristics on their level of political participation, Lingenfelter (1985) was attempting to determine the factors that influence educational legislation in West Virginia as perceived by superintendents and legislators. Lingenfelter employed a quantitative methodology using an ex post facto research design. 55 West Virginia superintendents and 134 legislators participated in the study. It was found that both superintendents and legislators perceived face to face contact as significantly more influential than any other form of contact. A discrepancy in perspectives was identified as superintendents perceived the West Virginia Association of School Administrators (WVASA) and the West Virginia Department of Education as much more influential than legislators. Both legislators and superintendents perceived sub-groups of the legislature, including legislative leadership education committees, as influential to "some" degree. The legislators and school leaders also viewed groups composed of superintendents and lay people as having a high degree of influence in the development of educational legislation.

Not long after the research of Allen (1985) and Lingenfelter (1985), Manchin (1986) repeated the previous studies conducted by Moore (1970) in Colorado and Beavers (1978) in Mississippi. Manchin studied West Virginia superintendents and legislators' perceptions of superintendents' political role in educational decision making at the state level. This investigation sought to determine the role being taken by

superintendents and to assess superintendent and legislator perspectives of the role that superintendents should be taking. A quantitative methodology was used and the instrument utilized was a questionnaire that had previously been used by Moore (1970) and Beavers (1979). 74 legislators and 47 superintendents completed the questionnaire.

Manchin discovered that superintendents and legislators did not agree in their perceptions of superintendents' political activity. He noted that methods used by superintendents to contact legislators were perceived as ineffective. The two groups disagreed about the proper means for superintendents to secure support for educational legislation. Superintendents highly favored the formation of coalitions and supporting candidates to accomplish their goals. Age, experience, and geographic location were not found to be related to the political activity of superintendents or legislators receptiveness to the political activity of superintendents. Manchin found that superintendents and legislators agreed that superintendents had a good understanding of the political process in West Virginia. This finding contradicted previous findings of Moore and Beavers which determined that superintendents did not understand the political process. The results of this study also disagreed with previous findings that superintendents were unaware of what influences political decisions in West Virginia. However, Manchin's results support previous findings that the perceptions of superintendents and legislators are in alignment regarding the ideal political role of superintendents.

The perceptions of legislators and superintendents regarding their views on the real and ideal roles of superintendents in state politics were also studied by Cothron (1987) in Tennessee. A quantitative methodology was used with a questionnaire as the instrument of inquiry. 132 legislators and 141 superintendents completed the inquiry.

Cothron found that both groups had similar perceptions of the actual and ideal roles of the superintendent in state politics. He noted that superintendents viewed themselves as more successful in exerting influence on educational politics than they appeared to actually be. Both groups also largely viewed that superintendents performed their real roles in harmony with their perceived ideal roles.

In one of the studies most closely resembling the investigation of this researcher, Chojnacki (1992) investigated the perceptions of superintendents and legislators regarding lobbying strategies used by superintendents in Ohio. His goal was to identify and compare the superintendent and legislator's perceptions of lobbying strategies used most frequently by superintendents, lobbying strategies each group believed were most effective, and their opinions of the need for superintendents to be involved in state-level politics. To accomplish this task, Chojnacki followed a quantitative methodology using a survey to gather data from 132 Ohio legislators and 132 Ohio superintendents. He found that while both groups strongly agreed that superintendents should be involved in politics at the state level, superintendents' lobbying strategies were considered only somewhat effective by both parties. Legislators' views of superintendents' knowledge of educational legislation were lower than superintendents' perceptions of their knowledge. Chojnacki found that legislators reported superintendents engaging in influence strategies involving hostile behavior toward legislators, such as tactics of embarrassment and confrontation, at much higher levels than were reported by superintendents. He also noted that legislators reported they viewed the information gathered by education committees as far more important than information provided by superintendents.

Shortly following Chojnacki's research, Wood (1994) studied the school superintendent's role in state level educational decision making in Texas. The goal of his research was to identify the personal involvement of superintendents in state politics. He utilized a quantitative methodology and gathered information from 91 Texas legislators and 716 superintendents through a questionnaire. Wood employed a tabulation process to analyze his data and found that superintendents and legislators agreed to a large degree on the actual and ideal roles of the superintendent in educational decision making at the state level. Participants also agreed that superintendents needed to understand the political process and remain well-informed on political issues beyond the scope of education to be effective in state level decision making. He also reported that superintendents were most effective when presenting information to legislators in person, by telephone, or by letter.

Another study that added to the literature on the value of superintendent communication with legislators was conducted by Nelson (1994). He examined information sources legislators used when making educational policy decisions in an effort to ascertain how legislators prefer to obtain data about education. His aim was to determine when legislators receive information about educational needs and issues, when they prefer to receive it, from what sources they receive it, and what sources they view as most important and influential. In addition, he sought to identify the format in which legislators receive information and the format in which they prefer to receive information.

A quantitative methodology was utilized and 285 state senators and representatives from Kansas, Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma

completed the survey instrument. Nelson found that legislators preferred to receive information from constituents via letter or fax, followed by a phone call, and the least preferred communication method was a personal visit. However, Nelson found these preferences were not accurate when legislators were categorized by the type of district they represented. Legislators from rural districts rated personal visits as their favored communication method. Nelson also found that, in general, lawmakers want to receive information distributed evenly during the legislative session and throughout the entire year. The majority responded that they preferred not to be contacted on weekends. In response to the types of information they consider influential, legislators noted using both anecdotal and research-based data when making decisions.

In another study similar in nature to this research, Maldonado (2007) sought to identify the political activity of Texas school superintendents and their perceptions of their effectiveness. Her quantitative analysis included a survey of 150 Texas school superintendents. Maldonado found that during the 79th legislative session, superintendents were active in contacting their legislators; however, only 42% believed their communications were effective. Of the superintendents who contacted legislators, 66% were active in seeking out particular legislators. She discovered several variables that were significantly related to the political activity of superintendents, including the location of the superintendents' school districts in relation to Austin, the financial condition of the districts, the percentage of students in the districts categorized as economically disadvantaged, and the tenures of the superintendents. Superintendents were found to be most active with legislators when communicating support or opposition

to pending legislation. Only 20% of superintendents said they worked with legislators to define issues or draft legislation.

Role of Legislators in Educational Policy

There are several roles that legislators can play in regard to the development of educational policy. First, any legislator can choose to file a bill to be considered for adoption into law. In addition, some legislators are appointed to committees that are specifically designed to review education-related legislation. Furthermore, when bills are brought forth to the entire House or Senate, each legislator has the opportunity to both debate the merits of the bill and decide whether to cast their vote in favor of proposed policies.

Introduction of a Bill

For legislation to be enacted in Texas, a bill must first be introduced. While only Texas legislators can introduce a bill, bills originate from many sources outside these state lawmakers. Other sources of proposed legislation include special interest groups, which can be well-established organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) or individual citizens, including school superintendents. Bills are often drafted in response to previously enacted legislation and previously unsuccessful bills can be reintroduced for consideration every two years when the Texas legislature convenes.

Education committees. An extensive number of bills are filed for consideration during each biannual meeting of the Texas legislature. 5,796 bills were introduced during the 82nd Regular Legislative Session that concluded on May 30, 2011, of which 1,379 were passed by the legislature. Because of the immense number of bills created, it

is impossible for legislators to thoroughly review all bills filed. Therefore, standing committees are created in the House of Representatives and Senate. These committees have oversight of bills pertaining to 1) the Texas public school system finance system, 2) education programs for elementary and secondary public schools, 3) any changes to or creation of school districts, and 4) state agencies including the State Board of Education, the Texas Education Agency, the Office of the Commissioner of Education, the Office of Southern Regional Education Compact Commissioner for Texas, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the State Board for Educator Certification, and the Texas School for the Deaf.

Public education committees decide which bills move forward for consideration by all members of the House or Senate. It is the responsibility of the Speaker of the House to appoint the chair and half of the committee members on each standing committee, including the House Public Education Committee, while the Lieutenant Governor appoints the chair and committee members of the Education Committee in the Senate. During the 82nd legislative session, the House Public Education Committee was chaired by Rob Eissler and the Senate Education Committee by Florence Shapiro, both of whom did not return for the 83rd legislative session that convened on January 8, 2013, as Shapiro retired and Eissler was unsuccessful in a reelection campaign.

Once a bill has been sent to the Education Committee by the Speaker of the House, a copy of the bill is provided to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB). The LBB prepares a fiscal note which describes the economic impact of the bill should it be signed into law. When bills require extensive analysis, they may be assigned to sub-committees consisting of standing committee members for additional scrutiny. Sub-committees are

appointed by the committee chair. Following a report from the subcommittee, the standing committee will determine whether to forward the bill along for consideration by the entire House or Senate.

Conference committees and floor action. When a bill makes it through the standing committee, the legislation is assessed by the entire House or Senate, where the bill can be debated, amended, or approved. When a bill is approved by the House or Senate, it then progresses to the other chamber for review. This chamber can decide to vote on the bill or amend it. If a bill is amended, the originating chamber can accept the bill as amended or request the creation of a conference committee comprised of members of both chambers. The purpose of the conference committee is to resolve disagreements between versions of House and Senate bills. If the conference committee is able to produce a bill that is agreeable to both chambers, the bill is sent to the Governor for consideration of approval.

Influences on Legislators' Education Policy Decisions

There are numerous groups and individuals who could potentially influence the decisions of legislators regarding education policy. Some of those who persuade lawmakers are situated within the legislative system and could be classified as internal, while others with the power to sway legislator perspectives are external to the traditional political system.

Internal influences

A number of individuals and groups that could be classified as internal to the legislative system have been identified as potentially influential to the decisions made by

legislators. Included among this list of inside influences are fellow legislators, legislative staffers, and state organizations.

Fellow legislators. Legislative colleagues are certainly one of the most influential groups in determining the decisions of lawmakers. In a comparative analysis of quantitative studies conducted by the Columbia Institute of Political Research and graduate students of the College of St. Thomas, Brown (1989) found that elected officials strongly influenced legislative decisions of their colleagues. He further claimed the longer elected officials serve in office, the more reliant they become upon fellow lawmakers in making legislative decisions. Results discovered by Andero (2000) support Brown's findings. He noted that many legislators are aware of their lack of knowledge surrounding educational issues. Because they find themselves too busy to communicate with local superintendents when deciding on school matters, lawmakers instead seek the advice of a minority of legislators who are viewed as education experts. The opinions of these legislators perceived as most knowledgeable therefore carry great influence in determining policy decisions.

Legislative staff. With over 5,000 bills submitted and 1,000 bills passed during the 140 day Texas legislative session in 2011, legislators require assistance to gain insight into the intricacies and impacts that may be involved in new legislation. For this reason, each lawmaker is assisted by legislative staffers. The role of the representative or senator often impacts the number of staffers supporting the legislator; however, each has assistants who help to review, and at times draft, new bills. Legislators frequently have staff members responsible for analyzing education bills and keeping them abreast of school issues (Andero, 2000). Rosenthal and Fuhrman's (1981) study of lawmakers

revealed that staff members are responsible for “filtering” and “brokering” information among legislators and those who would seek to influence their opinion on a bill. Staffers are also expected to investigate the future impact of proposed policies, gather information from state agencies, and assist in developing new policy ideas. The more technical an issue becomes, such as school finance, the more dependant legislators were found to become upon their staff (Rosenthal & Fuhrman, 1981).

State organizations. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the State Department that governs public education. The TEA is headed by the Commissioner of Education, a position appointed by the governor. Robert Scott recently retired from this post and Governor Rick Perry has appointed Michael Williams as the agency’s new leader. The State Board of Education is comprised of 15 regional elected trustees who are responsible for regulating the TEA. The TEA oversees 20 regional education service centers (ESC’s) that provide technical support to school districts, opportunities for continuing education for teachers, administrators, and parents, and support for the implementation of educational programming (Boswell, 2010).

Rather than be support systems for local school districts, state departments of education are forced to serve as judge and jury. While the state department of education remains involved with disseminating information and providing training for superintendents and other school personnel, at the same time, it “holds the power to impose sanctions or publicly embarrass schools” (Conley, 2003, p. 134). However, Commissioner Scott took steps prior to his resignation to express concerns with standardized testing policies enacted by the Texas legislature that in his words had become a “perversion” of what they were intended to be. These comments drew

immediate reaction from legislators on both sides of the issue and increased the levels of debate on this already controversial topic.

External influences

Like the internal influences, external factions also impact the policy choices made by legislators. Included among groups outside the political system affecting legislation are special interest groups, big business, media, and professional organizations

Special interest groups. According to democratic theory, public authorities are responsive to the policy demands of their constituents (Wirt & Christovich, 1989). When disgruntled citizens unite to create pressure for legislators, lawmakers tend to respond by enacting policies in line with these demands. Even groups with lesser power can create pressures that outweigh the demands of larger organizations if their constituents focus sharply on a small number of issues. For this reason, single issue interest groups are particularly adept at influencing legislators (Netusil & Dunkin, 1974).

The political forces affecting decision making of Minnesota state lawmakers was studied by Malen (1985). His focus was to identify the central features of the legislative process and their implications on educational policy making. A qualitative design was employed with 72 legislators, interest group members, and media from four prior Minnesota legislative sessions (1955, 1971, 1976, and 1981 sessions) investigated using a multiple case study approach. Malen determined that policy information and analysis were insignificant aspects of the legislative process. Genuine policy debate was found to be nonexistent in the 1955 session and existed in a limited, superficial manner in the later sessions. It was concluded that additional inquiry of single issue interest groups was

necessary because they appeared to carry great influence in the policy decisions made by legislators.

Following Malen's work on factors affecting legislator's policy decisions, Brown (1989) reported that constituents were found to be considered by lawmakers as only average sources of information, yet constituents were determined to wield the greatest amount of influence on the decision-making of state and federal legislators. The political power that individuals have to influence legislators has become more fluid. State policies are no longer dominated by a few interest groups that can dominate a wide range of policies. This allows for a greater diversity of influence (Thomas & Hrebener, 1992). These factors support the assertion that legislators are making decisions in order to keep their position rather than based upon guiding principles.

Policy influence was further investigated by Rosenthal (1998), who discovered legislators have become more apt to respond to ordinary citizens' desires due to the increase in the ability of the general public to have their voice heard through the multiple forms of media that have increasingly connected American society. Legislators are thus more responsive to constituents' opinions and less independent in their decision-making. This results in a decline in the power of established legislative leaders and a subsequent rise in power for newly elected legislators (Rosenthal, 1998).

Shortly after Rosenthal's research, Baxt and Brouillette (1999) examined the influence of a single issue interest group in Texas focused on promoting inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms. Their qualitative design utilized a case study approach by interviewing a total of 46 Texas legislators and lobbyists. Research results supported the conclusion that the passage of inclusion

legislation was significantly impacted by the efforts of a well-financed lobbyist group that chose to focus its efforts and resources on this single issue. These researchers believe the most influential interest groups are those organizations focused on one particular issue who also are among the most well-financed and organized. Such organizations have the ability to call upon passionate supporters with little notice to advocate their position at the state capital.

Big business. Big business interests are perceived to have heavy influence on legislative decisions in education. Large scale changes in public education policy have been enacted in response to demands from the elite class, particularly from activists in big business (Odden, 1986). Mazzoni and Clugston (1987) studied the effects of big business lobbyists in the innovation of policies impacting school reform in Minnesota. This qualitative research employed a case study method to analyze the 1985 Minnesota legislative session and the role of the Minnesota Business Partnership (MBP) as a policy innovator in public education policy reform. In particular, the researchers sought to understand how the MBP attempted to influence lawmakers and to gauge the consequences of its efforts. They found that big business interest groups like MBP had limited influence on policy decisions and were only one of many actors in the reform of Minnesota education policy.

Brown (1989) also reported that special interest groups from the business sector appeared to have marginal influence on the legislature's decisions on education policy. Yet, when analyzing individual lawmakers, a distinct discrepancy emerged in the level of influence these special interest groups played. Representatives from areas where big business was prominent were more likely to give greater consideration to their interests.

As legislative staffs have grown, allowing representatives greater access to detailed information on issues including education, the reliance of legislators on lobbyists and special interest groups has diminished (Brown, 1989).

When schools and businesses partner in ways that bring business-members into the classrooms, the majority of cases result in the participants' views of the school improving (Glass et al., 2000). Conley (2003) notes that the increasing influence of state legislators in education policy making has also opened the door to business interests having a greater voice in education. "Legislatures have functioned as forums where the business community in particular is able to exert influence successfully and build political coalitions for the passage of education reform programs" (p. 228). It appears from a review of the literature that the actual power of big business in impacting education legislation may be growing.

Media. Along with constituents and big business lobbyists, the media also can have a substantial influence on education policy. As Kowalski (2011) pointed out, the media can perform some valued services, such as keeping the public informed of existing and emerging education needs. Fowler (2000, p.56) adds that "because the media must screen, select, explain, and re-contextualize information, they inevitably play a major role in the policy process". In their investigation of urban school executives, Fuller et al. (2003) found that superintendents were particularly open to media attention to highlight aspects of the school when superintendents were looking for ways to motivate people toward change. "Media attention, if you manage it, is incredibly powerful if you get it on your side" (Fuller, 2003, p.35).

Professional organizations. As legislators have taken more control of school finance and policy, the influence of education professionals has become fragmented. The National Education Association (NEA) once acted on behalf of school boards, administrators, and teachers. The cohesion among these groups dissipated. This breakdown created a diminished focus on issues of importance to educators at the local level and reduced their effectiveness in lobbying (Wirt & Kirst, 1989)

Netusil and Dunkin (1974) found that superintendents in Iowa became less involved with their state legislators when a new lobbyist position was added by the Iowa Association of School Administrators. The researchers believed superintendents made the assumption that this role would substitute for their efforts to advocate for their individual school districts. Brown (1989) asserted that state education policy could be notably impacted if superintendents, principals, and school board members worked together. These groups could gain particular strength if they would unite within legislative districts. In doing so, they would not only represent their causes as professionals, but they would also be classified as a constituent group, which Brown found to be the number one influence on legislators' decisions. Coalitions can also be established locally among school employees, parents, businesses, and citizen groups. The issues addressed by a local group will often be more narrow and attempt to address a smaller number of issues. This unification of stakeholders can have a powerful impact on the position of legislators (Marinelli, 1996)

To be an effective leader today, the superintendent must be open to collaborating with other superintendents (McClellan, Ivory & Dominguez, 2008). This can be accomplished by establishing a consortium of districts that allow for the pooling of

knowledge and the creation of solutions to current issues (Marinelli, 1996). Consortiums can serve lobbying functions for schools with similar legislative policy issues, allowing the pooling of resources and a unified voice that can command more attention than a single school district would. Superintendents' roles as members of the consortium can include communicating in person or by phone with legislators at the capitol, sending written correspondence, and encouraging advocacy on the part of fellow staff members and local constituents.

Teacher organizations. In their case study of the impact of big business on state school reform in Minnesota, Mazzoni and Clugston (1987) determined that legislators saw little advantage in pushing for school reforms when educator resistance was strong. Although this power on the part of the educator lobby was not absolute, it was a significant deterrent to legislators contemplating policy change. In an Illinois study conducted by Bennett, Heller, and Weldon (1990), it was found that the state legislatures' most supported lobbying organization was the teachers' organization, the Illinois Education Association.

These studies reinforce the importance of groups with education interests uniting behind a few commonly agreed upon issues each legislative session. They suggest that teacher and administrator organizations could be extremely influential working together to address issues such as standardized testing and school finance.

The Process of Influencing Legislation

Models have been developed by previous scholars to aid in understanding how individuals or groups influence legislation. Easton's (1965) Dynamic Response model

addressed legislative influence from a broad policy perspective. Berry's (1977) four categories of influence provided more in-depth descriptions of actions and strategies utilized by lobbyists to influence policy decisions. Iannaccone's (1967) construct more specifically addressed a framework by which one can view the "structural linkage" between the legislature and groups of educators. Each of these models contributes to the understanding of the superintendent's role in attempting to influence the development of state educational policies.

Easton's Dynamic Response Model

This model posits that the political system is surrounded by external environmental factors that impact the political system. Easton divides these environmental factors into two subsystems, the intra-social environment (including ecological, biological, personality, and social systems) and the extra-social environment (including international political, international ecological, and international social systems). At times, either of these external subsystems creates disturbances that stress the political system. These stresses flow from the external environment (outputs) and enter the political system (inputs).

Inputs are categorized as either demands or supports. Request for government assistance such as additional funding for the education of students who do not speak English would be an example of a demand. Supports are classified as a willingness to consent to decisions made by the political system. Some inputs that enter the political system are converted into new legislation (outputs). The model is cyclical as these new policies (outputs) created by the political system now re-enter as inputs into the

environmental subsystems from which they originated. Chojnacki (1992) utilized Easton's model in his study. He limited his research to focus only on the demand variable originating from the environment. The sole demand analyzed was lobbying strategies superintendents used to influence state legislators.

Berry's Four Categories of Influence Strategies Utilized by Lobbyists

According to Berry (1977), lobbyists employ four strategies to influence policy decisions. Which strategy a lobbyist chooses to utilize is dependent on the goals of the lobbying organization and environmental variables. However, Berry noted that groups typically use a variety of strategies rather than focusing on one.

The four strategies identified by Berry were law, embarrassment and confrontation, information, and constituency influence and pressure. Law can be used as an influence strategy in two ways. Some view law as a way to work within the political system without lowering their ethical standards while others see their purpose as ensuring that the law is enforced as written. Those who choose embarrassment and confrontation as a lobbying style hold an antagonistic, distrusting perception of governmental leadership. Conversely, lobbyists who employ an information-based approach believe that progress can be made by developing personal relationships and providing accurate data. Those who choose Berry's fourth strategy, constituency influence and pressure, believe lobbying is a matter of persuasion. They often seek to gain this power by using a "grass roots" approach to encourage legislators to take actions desired by the lobbyist (Berry, 1970).

Iannaccone's Construct

Iannaccone's (1967) construct is a theory developed to interpret educational policy making at the state level. The idea centers on "structural linkages" that Iannaccone claims exist between the legislature and groups of educators. There are four stages in this structure that states move between. The first state (Type I) is the "disparate" state. This condition is present when the legislature is confronted by local school districts regarding diverse interests of their particular entity. The "monolithic" state (Type II) is characterized by a united group of educators lobbying the legislature regarding topics the group agrees upon. Iannaccone's third state is termed "fragmented". In this type, conflict is rampant between educator groups, resulting in competing legislation brought forth for consideration. The last state, "syndical", exists when a group is created by the government to serve as the main mechanism to interact with the legislature, such as a special task force composed to study the college-readiness of high school graduates.

Gap in the Research

While a review of the literature reveals researchers have examined the political role of the superintendent from many angles, few prior studies have utilized a qualitative approach to specifically focus on the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policy. Prior investigations by Chojnacki (1992) and Maldonado (2007) have recommended that researchers undertake a qualitative approach to study the interactions of superintendents with legislators in attempting to influence the development of educational policy. Furthermore, although frameworks have been created by Easton, Berry, and Iannaccone to explain various aspects of political behaviors

and tactics that can be applied to the role of the superintendent, none of these models were designed to describe specific strategies employed by superintendents when attempting to influence the development of educational policy. With the research revealing increasing demands placed on school districts and their superintendents due to legislative mandates, an examination of the strategies that superintendents utilize to influence the creation of these policies would enhance the knowledge and understanding of the political role of the superintendent in the development of educational policy.

Summary

The role of the superintendent has evolved since its inception. One of the changes to the position has been an increased need for the district's chief executive to consistently interact with a broader scope of stakeholders, including state legislators. State lawmakers have become increasingly involved in developing policies that impact local school districts. Previous studies have been conducted to better understand superintendents' involvement with political leaders, and models have been created that describe the political behavior of school leaders. However, researchers have identified aspects of this issue that are in need of further investigation, including the strategies used by superintendents to influence the development of legislative policy, which will be the focus of this study. In order to better understand the political role of the superintendent and fill a gap that exists in the research literature, this research now shifts to describe the methodology of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Procedures

As state and federal governments have expanded their involvement in the creation of educational policies in areas previously considered under the auspices of local school districts, such as school funding, curriculum development, and assessment practices, superintendent and school board decision making authority has eroded (Netusil & Dunkin, 1974; Bennett, Heller & Weldon, 1990; Andero, 2001; Glass et al., 2000; Fuller, Campbell, Celio & Harvey, 2003). These governmental mandates have complicated what was already a challenging leadership position for the school district's chief executive (Kowalski, Peterson, Young & Ellerson, 2011). In light of this reality, the purpose of this investigation was to identify the perceptions of Texas public school superintendents and legislators regarding strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that were utilized in this study. It begins by identifying the research questions that were the focus of this inquiry. Second, the research design used in this study is explained. A description of the sample of participants is provided and the data collection processes are detailed. Finally, the data analysis procedures employed in this study are depicted.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the research process:

1. How do Texas superintendents perceive they influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?
2. How do Texas legislators perceive Texas superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

3. What commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators in regard to how superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

Methodology

The selection of a research methodology should be determined by the researcher according to the theoretical worldview of the researcher (Willis, 2007). The constructivist framework best embodies the perspective of this researcher. Anfar and Mertz (2006) write that constructivism “maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (p. 26). Thus, the intent was to construct meaning from the perceptions of Texas public school superintendents and legislators in regard to the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence legislators during the development of education policies.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was utilized in this study. Creswell (2003) defines the qualitative approach as “one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives or advocacy/participatory perspectives” (p.18). Qualitative research allows for studies to be conducted by researchers without a pre-determined model. Instead, the experiences unveiled by the participants in the study guide the direction of the research (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) notes that qualitative research allows for topics to be examined in great depth because detailed information on the phenomena being studied is gathered that takes contextual variables into account.

Given that this research was intended to uncover the perceptions of superintendents and legislators regarding influence strategies employed by superintendents, the use of qualitative methodology that allows for the gathering of detailed information while also considering contextual issues was appropriate. The researcher's selection of qualitative methodology is supported by Patton (2002)

Qualitative inquiry is highly appropriate for studying process because (1) depicting process requires detailed descriptions of how people engage with each other, (2) the experience of process typically varies for different people so their experiences need to be captured in their words, (3) process is fluid and dynamic so it can't be fairly summarized on a single rating scale at one point in time, and (4) participants' perceptions are a key process consideration. (p. 159).

Qualitative methodology has several strengths (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It focuses on "naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" (p.10). Another positive aspect of qualitative studies is the richness and holistic nature of the data obtained through processes such as open-ended interviews and observations. These data can provide "thick descriptions that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader" (Miles and Huberman, p. 10). Another benefit to qualitative data is the fact that it is typically collected over a sustained period of time, allowing for processes to be more thoroughly studied. Additionally, the flexibility of qualitative studies gives the researcher the ability to adjust data collection times or methods as needed throughout the investigation (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

However, qualitative design also has limitations. Limitations of the qualitative design utilized in this study include the small sample size of superintendents and legislators that were interviewed, the experience of the researcher in utilizing the data gathering and data analysis processes associated with qualitative methodology and

grounded theory, and the researcher bias that is inherent in qualitative research.

Interviews were conducted with only a small number of the current Texas public school superintendents and Texas legislators. While this allowed for an in-depth analysis of the individuals involved in the study, the findings may not be generalized to the larger population of superintendents and legislators in Texas or across the nation. Furthermore, this was the first study undertaken by this researcher utilizing qualitative methodology and grounded theory. Thus, there may be researcher error that exists due to limited experience on the part of the researcher. Though this was the first qualitative study conducted by this researcher, courses that focus extensively on qualitative research processes have recently been undertaken by the researcher in preparation for this inquiry.

Finally, the role of the researcher as a participant in qualitative research is not free from bias.

Qualitative research rejects the very idea that you can be objective and neutral in research. You pick certain things to study because you have an interest. You probably also have an idea about the results and conclusions you will end up with. That makes the study subjective. (Willis, 2007, p. 210).

In studies of this nature, the researcher is directly involved in the formulation of data and thus acts as an instrument by determining what questions to pose, when to pose the questions, as well as being an observer of the process (Mertens, 2005). Because the researcher is a participant in the process, the inherent bias of the researcher must be acknowledged. McEwan and McEwan (2003) assert that qualitative researchers must “disclose their biases, predispositions, and even connections to the subject of the study” (p. 84). Therefore, it is important to note that the researcher has worked as an educator in Texas public schools since 1998, serving as a teacher at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels, and as an assistant principal and campus principal at the high

school level. Currently, the researcher is pursuing a doctorate degree in educational administration. These experiences as primarily an educator in public high schools create a natural bias. However, the researcher has not previously served as a superintendent or legislator, the two roles being studied in this research. As suggested by Creswell (2003), the researcher practiced self-reflection in this study to create “an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p.196).

While these limitations exist in this study, they do not detract from the value of the study. Further, qualitative methodology guidelines provide the researcher with strategies to guarantee quality measures and the opportunity to potentially find deep meaning and develop worthwhile contributions that provide for greater understanding of the phenomena being studied.

Grounded theory. According to Creswell (2003), there are five major categories of qualitative research: narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, case studies, and grounded theory. This study followed grounded theory guidelines. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define grounded theory as “a specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data” (p. 1). According to Willis (2007), researchers use this approach to work with waves of data, developing and modifying theory throughout the data gathering and analysis process. Tentative theories are developed and tested as more data is obtained. If new data concurs with the current theory, it is maintained. However, if the researcher collects data that disputes the developed theory, the theory is adjusted to account for all data accumulated. Patton (2002) points out that the researcher does not dictate the direction of the study by

applying personal pre-conceived notions but instead allows the data gathered during the inquiry to determine the outcome of the study and the generation of theory.

Description of Sample

Qualitative research calls for purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Thus, a purposive sampling method was utilized to select Texas superintendents and legislators for this study. Purposive sampling is a technique that allows the researcher to select “information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Specific criteria were developed by the researcher to include candidates for study who would provide the depth of information required for this inquiry.

Mertens (2005) advises qualitative researchers to report the criteria used to select interviewees along with detailed descriptions of the research site and setting. Three Texas public school superintendents and three state legislators were included in this study. Each superintendent had a minimum of eighteen years experience in the role of superintendent. One superintendent was selected from a small school district (less than 2,000 students K-12), one from a mid-size school district (between 2,000 and 20,000 students K-12), and one from a large school district (greater than 20,000 students K-12). The researcher identified superintendents who had been active in the political realm of their position at the state level by either serving on legislative education sub-committees or testifying before legislators on issues related to public education. Identification of candidates meeting these criteria was accomplished by developing a list of potential candidates through discussions with a group of experts, including retired superintendents, professors of educational administration, and a member of the Texas Association of

School Administrators' (TASA) executive leadership team. Contact was initially made with potential superintendent participants by retired superintendents assisting the researcher. The researcher then contacted the participants by phone to explain the purpose of the study and request agreement to be included in the study. All three superintendents who were contacted agreed to participate.

The sample of legislators included individuals who have served a minimum of three terms as a state representative in Texas since 2004. The researcher obtained access to legislators who had previously served on the House Public Education Committee and had sponsored legislation specifically related to public education. A diverse pool of legislators was sought, with participation from members of both the Republican and Democratic parties. Determination of which legislators met the criteria was accomplished through a review of the biographies of Texas lawmakers available on the websites of the Texas House of Representatives and Texas Senate. From these eligible current and prior lawmakers, a list of six candidates was selected for contact with the consultation of the previously mentioned group of experts.

Contact with the legislators was made with the assistance of one of these experts, who made an initial inquiry with staff members for five of the six legislators selected as potential candidates. The researcher then emailed these previously contacted staff members to provide information regarding the study and to request the participation of the legislator with which they worked. Each staff member responded after communicating with their legislators, with three of the five legislators agreeing to participate. The two legislators among this group who did not agree to participate cited a lack of time available as the reason for not agreeing to participate. For the sixth potential

legislative candidate, the researcher contacted the staff member overseeing educational legislation by email to request this lawmaker's participation. However, no response was ever received regarding this inquiry.

Research Participants

Each participant consented to contribute to this study anonymously and met the criteria for involvement in this study as previously detailed by the researcher. In an effort to ensure the anonymity of participants, some names found in interview transcripts and reported in this study have been altered. All participants were interviewed in person at a location agreed upon by the researcher and the participants.

Superintendent interview participants. Three superintendents were involved in this study. Superintendent A has served as superintendent of a small school district for more than 15 years. Superintendent B has worked as superintendent of a mid-size district for almost 20 years, and Superintendent C has over 15 years of superintendent experience across various school district sizes, with over 5 years of that experience as superintendent of a large school district. Each superintendent has been an active member of professional organizations, including the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), and each has been actively engaged in the process of developing educational policy with legislators, including providing testimony during legislative sessions and participating as members of state-wide legislative committees.

Legislator interview participants. Three Texas Legislators were included in the study, each having served at least three terms in the House of Representatives. Legislator A is a member of the Republican Party with experience as a member of the House Public

Education Committee who has also authored bills impacting public education. Legislator B is a member of the Democratic Party who also has experience as a member of the House Public Education Committee and has authored bills regarding public education. Finally, Legislator C is a member of the Republican Party with experience as a member of the House Public Education Committee and has also previously put forth legislation affecting public education.

Data Collection Procedures

This section describes the procedures and instruments used to collect data in this study. Prior to collecting any data, approval was requested to conduct this research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office of the University of Texas at Austin. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher began contacting the superintendents and legislators purposely selected for the study from the list of potential participants meeting the requirements set forth during the proposal of this research.

Data Collection Instruments

Data was obtained from participants through the use of two semi-structured, open-ended interview protocols. Mertens (2005) identifies interviews as one of the predominant sources of data in qualitative studies. This research gathered perceptions of superintendents and legislators during one-on-one interviews with three Texas public school superintendents and three Texas legislators to uncover the unique perspectives of each participant. Patton (2002) asserts that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspectives of others are meaningful, knowable, and able to be made

explicit” (p. 341). An interview guide employing open-ended questions was developed by the researcher based on a review of the relevant literature, discussions with school superintendents, and feedback from selected members of the researcher’s doctoral faculty. Creating an interview guide allows interviews of multiple individuals to be more systematic and comprehensive by identifying important concepts to be investigated prior to conducting the interviews (Patton, 2002).

Once the interview protocol was established, pilot interviews were conducted with two current Texas superintendents to enhance the instrument and allow the researcher an opportunity to practice the process before beginning the official data gathering process. When the interview guide was ready to implement, the researcher secured the participants’ consent to use a recording device during the interviews. During the interviews, the interviewer took notes, and following the interviews, the interviewer transcribed the digital recordings. Interview sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes.

The participants interacted with the researcher for the purpose of data gathering on two separate occasions. The formal interview occurred during the first interaction with each participant. This was an in-person meeting and included discussion of all questions identified in the appropriate interview protocol. Two of the superintendents were interviewed on separate occasions at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Austin, Texas. The third superintendent was interviewed in the cafeteria of the Capitol building. Two of the legislator participants were interviewed in their offices in the Capitol, with the third legislator interviewed in a conference room in the Capitol.

The second interaction occurred approximately one month after the initial interview. The purpose of the second contact was to clarify any uncertainties the

researcher had following transcription and review of the initial interview. These interactions took place via phone call and lasted approximately 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

This study analyzed data gathered from the semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted with Texas public school superintendents and legislators. Patton (2002) identifies that attempting to make sense of data is one of the great challenges in qualitative analysis. Therefore, the researcher began the analysis of data by reading and listening to interview transcripts prior to beginning the coding processes that were employed to identify emergent themes from the data. Each recorded interview was transcribed and checked for accuracy by replaying the audio recording while reading the transcript. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identify three stages of coding utilized in the analytic process of grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding. Open coding is an iterative process. It is an ongoing progression that requires the researcher to continually reflect upon the data in an attempt to group individual incidents described by the interviewees (Patton, 2002). The data analysis process is not clearly divided from the data gathering process and can inform the researcher during data gathering, such as guiding the formulation of new or modified questions in the interview protocol (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The themes identified in the early stages of analysis were reviewed and adjusted when warranted as additional data was obtained to inform emerging themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress the importance of the researcher continually cycling between analyzing the current data and allowing the current data to inform strategies that can lead

to the collection of new data. The researcher continued to refine themes created during the early phases of data analysis as new information was acquired.

Axial coding. Axial coding is the “process of relating categories to their subcategories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.123). Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that axial coding enables the researcher to create connections between categories and subcategories found in the data which reveals the complexity of the phenomena being studied. During axial coding, evidence should continue to be sought that supports or debunks the relationships that have been identified within the data (Patton, 2002). Thus, the researcher in this study analyzed the concepts categorized during the early phases of data analysis to alter them appropriately when new data supported such a change.

Selective coding. Once the data had been collected and initially analyzed to establish relationships among categories and their subcategories by utilizing open and axial coding, the selective coding process began. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that, during the selective coding process, the researcher establishes a central category that connects all other identified categories garnered from the data. Selective coding allows the researcher to create a storyline from the data and offer hypotheses based upon this storyline (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the researcher analyzed the data to identify the one core theme that related to all other themes that emerged from the data. From that central theme, the researcher developed a theory that allowed for the connection of all identified themes to the selected foundational concept.

Reliability and validity. Reliability can be addressed in only a limited way in qualitative research while validity is considered a strength of qualitative methods. Creswell (2003) claims that “validity does not carry the same connotations as it does in

quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability” (p. 195). Validity is used to ensure the accuracy of data from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, or individuals reading the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study addressed the validity of the data gathered by utilizing the following methods: member-checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data.

Member-checking involves providing participants with a final report or detailed accounts of themes gleaned from the data to determine the accuracy of the researcher’s representations of the participant’s perceptions (Cresswell, 2003). To complete member checks, after the researcher analyzed the interview data and themes had been deduced, each participating superintendent and legislator was provided with copies of the transcripts from their interview sessions to allow them the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the information. The superintendent interview transcripts were emailed to participants, and the researcher hand delivered interview transcripts to the Capitol offices of each participating legislator. One superintendent noted some biographical information that was inaccurate in the transcript. This data was adjusted based on the feedback provided by this participant.

Peer debriefing also enhances the accuracy of qualitative research. This process requires “a peer debriefer who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 196). The researcher used two peer debriefers to gain multiple opinions regarding the study.

Triangulation is a technique that allows the researcher to cross-check information gathered from several sources to locate commonalities in the data (O’Donoghue &

Punch, 2003). Mertens (2005) states that triangulation of data is typically accomplished by scrutinizing information gathered from data sources such as interviews, observations, and the review of archival documents. Because this study relied solely on information gathered through in-depth one-on-one interviews with superintendents and legislators, the triangulation of data from different sources was difficult to accomplish. However, the researcher attempted to triangulate the data gathered by comparing information across all interview data from each participant in the formulation of themes derived in this inquiry.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the methodologies and procedures that were utilized in analyzing the perceptions of superintendents and legislators regarding superintendent influence during the development of educational policy. The chapter began by identifying the purpose of the study and the established research questions. The qualitative research methodology used for this study was detailed along with the researcher's chosen research design of grounded theory. In addition, information was given regarding the sample for this study, procedures and instruments used during data collection, and the methods used for the analysis of data. In the following chapter, data obtained during the study will be highlighted along with the major themes and concepts identified from the research.

Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter three presented the methodology employed by the researcher to discover the perceptions of Texas public school superintendents and legislators regarding strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. This chapter confers the findings for each of the three research questions in this study and provides additional findings that are relevant to this topic of study. The chapter begins by detailing the perceptions of the superintendents involved in this research. Next, the data gathered from interviews with legislators are presented. Then, the results of the first two research questions are compared to identify commonalities and differences between the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators. Finally, additional findings gleaned from participant interviews are shared.

Research Question 1

How do Texas superintendents perceive they influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

After reviewing the data, there are three major themes that seem to coalesce in determining the findings. The first theme involves superintendents interacting directly with legislators and their staff members when attempting to influence the development of educational policies. A second theme that emerges from the data is the participation of superintendents as members of professional organizations. Additionally, findings suggest that superintendents enlist their local stakeholders, including parents, school district staff, and School Board members in order to affect policy creation.

Interacting with Legislators and Their Staff Members

According to the participating superintendents, they interact directly with legislators and their staff members when attempting to influence educational policy development. The data suggested that superintendents and legislators both play a role in selecting the environments in which they will interact. Also, findings indicate that school leaders interact with lawmakers and their staff members to build rapport. Respondents also revealed superintendent efforts to provide information to lawmakers and their staff members to shape educational policy development. Additionally, the results show that superintendents facilitate dealings between legislators to impact the creation of policy.

Selecting Environments Where Interactions Occur

According to the data, the environments where superintendents interact with legislators when attempting to influence educational policy development are determined by both parties. The superintendents noted their contact with policy makers occurred in formal and informal settings. The formal venues included one-on-one meetings in the legislators' district offices or offices at the Capitol, one-on-one meetings at the superintendents' offices or on school campuses, and in meetings with groups of superintendents at Regional Education Service Centers around Texas. Additionally, they reported engaging with legislators at legislative committee meetings at the Capitol and during special events such as the Texas Association of School Administrators Mid-winter Conference. Superintendent B shared her personal preference in regard to the appropriate environments in which to engage legislators about education policy.

I'm very much a person that business is business and personal is personal and if I want to talk about business, it's going to be in the appropriate environment and

with that agenda for business...I'm not going to bother them at the grocery store and I'm not going to bother them at a ball game or a banquet or anything like that....I just feel like business needs to be handled in the appropriate area.

However, not all interactions with legislators occur in formal settings. There were non-traditional areas identified by superintendents as venues utilized to engage with legislators in an attempt to influence lawmakers' beliefs. Superintendent A described such occasions.

If you get to know folks...as you know them, I've had opportunities on occasion to be sitting in a Senate Ed. Meeting with Senator Shapiro and all the sudden I look up and she's saying, "Meet me outside....in the hallway"...so once you get to know people...once you've been around....you get many unusual opportunities....Airports...airplanes...you talk about a great opportunity...captive audience...and if you develop that rapport...If you know those people...I don't ever...I'm not...It's not my nature to be dogmatic in those circumstances...but if they want to talk....let me put it the other way...if they don't want to talk, you're not going to be sitting with them on the plane...and that's ok...I understand...but sometimes they're going to say "Hey....sit here, we need to talk".

Superintendent A also talked about the fact that opportunities for influential interactions with legislators often occur in the very late hours of legislative sessions.

I've been in situations behind closed doors at 2 a.m. in the Capitol building where he would look over and there would be eight to ten of us there, three or four senators...a couple of lobbyists and maybe one or two superintendents...staying with him until 2 in the morning...doing what you have to do...and something would come up...and without ever saying a word...he'd look at me...and he wanted a verbal sign...of how that affected our people...it wasn't necessarily me...but in our region ...How does this work for us...That's why you have to know how things affect the whole state, how it affects your region, and how it affects you.

Building Rapport with Legislators

Individuals build rapport by creating relationships marked by mutual understandings and clear communication of each person's thoughts and views. The efforts of the school district's chief executive to establish rapport with legislators was identified as a key element in a superintendent's ability to influence educational policy

development. The superintendent participants pointed out several strategies they used to build rapport with legislators. These included getting to know potential legislators while they were still candidates, showing respect to legislators, and being available as a resource for lawmakers when needed.

Getting to know legislators early. The superintendent participants described actions they took to meet with potential legislators prior to their elections in order to introduce themselves. They explained that this proactive approach can provide the opportunity for superintendents to form a bond with new legislators that might later aid the mission of their school districts. Superintendent A explained how an early meeting he set with a candidate to introduce himself ultimately contributed to the superintendent becoming someone on whom the legislator relied.

Our House member was new this last session, as so many are going to be this time...When he was running for office....I went to see him...I called him up and went and sat down and visited, just to talk over issues... I wanted him to know who I was when I walked in the room...When then he was elected I called him up...I went to his office and we visited again...We don't agree on everything ... but when it came time a little bit later...he said...he called me and he said "I want to meet with a group of superintendents" and I said "It's done"....You need to become their "go to" person...and you do that one-on-one.

Similarly, Superintendent B described the positive result of her first meeting with a candidate who went on to win office.

It was quite obvious he was out of touch with what was going on...so I just kind of challenged him and said "You know sir, I would love to invite you to my school. Come spend the day with me and I want you to see what's going on in our school"...and I said "You can come any day."....and I really thought he wouldn't really do it, but he did...His staff called me and he came and spent the day....He said "What time do you want me to be there?" and I said "I want you there at 7:30 when we unload buses. I want you helping feed pre-k breakfast and you will be here all day and I will have you scheduled on all campuses."...and he came with his staff person that was trying to get him elected...spent all day...at 4 o'clock he came to my office...He was there until 6:30 with me explaining the

finance system and all to him...and I think that was the most powerful thing because I invited him to my world to experience it.

Superintendent C also shared an experience in which he worked to forge a relationship with a legislator prior to his election.

I requested a meeting with him before the general election...he had already won the primary...and we met for about 45 minutes...and it reminded me of the first five rounds of a heavyweight boxing match...Nobody hit anybody and everybody was kind of measuring...just trying to figure out the other side and we left and I said "I want you to understand something. I will never lie to you...Whether I give you a good answer or a bad answer and I will deal directly with you on any issue rather than going to people in the community...I said if I have something bad to say to you I'm going to say it to your face...and I will keep you abreast of what's going on in this district and I will tell you what I think is bad policy and good policy...and I said I will be available to you anytime you want to ask me a question...I will give you a straight answer.

Showing respect for the legislator. Another tactic identified by superintendent participants for building rapport with legislators was for the superintendent to consistently show respect for the formal position of the legislator. The superintendents pointed out that they disagree with legislators in a civil manner that does not unnecessarily strain their relationships. Superintendent A explained the common understanding he had come to with his legislator. "Through the years we've just agreed to understand that we are not going to agree with all and as long as we don't bash anybody, just be honest." Superintendent C shared similar sentiment.

Number one is you never embarrass a legislator...so when you are in a group setting...even if you have got the greatest zinger that you would love to ask and it would put them on the spot...Unless you have already decided that you want to create an enemy out of this person for the rest of the session, don't ask it...That's what private meetings are for...Even if you totally disagree with their ideology, you never throw up blocks to being able to discuss an issue from a respectful stance...That's just good common sense...Once you violate that trust, then you've got nothing...It takes a lot of work on the part of the superintendent...a lot of biting tongues...biting the side of your lips...and learning how not to react facially or physically to comments...laughing...smiling...and disagreeing while you are doing it...That's the key.

Superintendent A summed up the importance of behaving in a respectful manner toward legislators by noting that superintendents “gotta have a seat at the table...gotta maintain those relationships”.

Being available. The superintendents interviewed in this study identified availability as a school leaders attempt to build rapport. The data revealed that superintendents make themselves available by quickly responding to requests for information and by being physically present to provide assistance during legislative sessions. The ability of superintendents to create a rapport in which the legislator and his or her staff see that superintendents are willing to help in any way possible was recognized by participants as critical. Superintendent A explained the importance of the superintendent being the “go to guy” for a legislator and staff members.

All legislators need people to rely upon.... You need to become that person...and you do that through your expertise... You’ve got to understand your subject matter...and you’ve got to be willing...a willing participant...that will go way above and beyond what others will do...what even seems reasonable at times... You do it through persistent communication that is pertinent to the situation... You’ve got to know how it’s going to affect you... You’ve got to know how it’s going to affect other school districts in your region... The people that he represents... You’ve got to know how it’s going to affect the state....and you’ve got to just be there.

However, the location of the superintendent’s district in relation to Austin was noted as a hindrance to a superintendent’s ability to consistently assist legislators. Superintendent A described the extent to which his School Board was willing to allow him to go in order to be available for his legislator.

I spent 17 days in a row down here...there were days when I may not even see him....and I was sitting at his office door...I’d see him...but I mean...just going in and out...but it was because he asked me to be there... You’ve got to be available.

Establishing Relationships with Legislative Staff Members

The interactions between superintendents and representatives' legislative staff members were found to be an extremely important action to influencing the development of educational policies. All participants stressed that they spend time developing a relationship with the legislative staff members, particularly the Chief of Staff and any staff member dealing primarily with educational issues. Superintendent A discussed the need to know the staff members well, saying "Legislators have aides. They have people who are in charge of certain aspects of their term...gotta know those folks....gotta know them well...gotta visit with them when you're in town...stop by and talk". In addition, Superintendent B addressed the need to become familiar with staff members. She remarked that the staff member who specializes in education policy is essential in getting her ideas before the legislator.

Yeah, you need to know your legislator, he or she needs to know you, but who you really need to bond with is their education staffer...that's the important person...I'm not going to see Reese at 10 o'clock...I'm going to see Grayson...I have material for Grayson....Grayson will read....Grayson will prepare and Grayson will show him....you know..."Sir, this is what this means...blah blah blah"....the staffer is the important one.

According to participants, there are additional benefits that can result when superintendents invest time in establishing rapport with legislative staff members.

Superintendent C described how his school district profited because he had the chance to share his district's story more often than many other superintendents.

I spent a lot of time working with staff...As a result I got a lot of calls from staff members..."Hey, we got this complaint...we heard this...is this true... how does this impact?"Well, I'm always providing information from my district....There's a bunch of other superintendents in that Senatorial District who didn't get those calls because they hadn't cultivated a relationship.

The respondents pointed out that legislators have staff members who work in Austin at the Capitol, but they also expressed that legislators have staff located in the districts they represent. Participants expressed that school leaders need to develop strong relationships with staffers in both offices. According to Superintendent C, drawbacks exist when a superintendent wants to work with a lawmaker during the legislative session if the superintendent has not previously established a rapport with members of that legislator's staff.

During the legislative session...you get to work with staff...and so the key things are you develop relationships with your legislators but you develop better relationships with their staff...their district staff and their Austin staff so they know your name...they know who you are..and they know your reputation with the legislator...Then, during the session it's easier to get their attention because they've heard you before...They know who you are...They know what you've done...If you just show up during the session they're going to say, "You know, evidently you're not that interested"...They've told me that.... "I never hear from my superintendents"...That's sad.

Providing Legislators and Their Staff Members with Information

In addition to interacting with legislators and their staff members to build rapport, superintendent participants also described methods by which they provide legislators and staff members with information to influence the development of educational policy. The superintendents described their participation on legislative sub-committees and their role in providing testimony to lawmakers. Additionally, respondents discussed utilizing various forms of communication when providing legislators with information as well as their strategic understanding of the importance of the timing of their communication with lawmakers. Furthermore, insight was shared by superintendents regarding the information they provide legislators to offer input during the development of new legislation along with tactics employed to facilitate interactions between legislators.

Serving on legislative sub-committees. According to participants, superintendents serve on specific legislative sub-committees based on direct invitation by legislators. As Superintendent C elaborated, the inclusion of superintendents on legislative sub-committees is vital because they bring a “ground-level mentality and information to those committees where legislators are looking at 30,000 feet level....well things look pretty good at 30,000 feet but when they land on ground level it looks like a Tyrannosaurus Rex”. A participant noted, by being a member of a sub-committee, superintendents have an opportunity to connect the ideology behind a concept being considered with the realities of implementation in a school district. Superintendent C commented that superintendent membership on legislative sub-committees helps to thwart poor policy. “I think they have prevented some really disastrous actions in the past simply because of their knowledge and expertise and their ability to communicate”.

The data indicated that the effectiveness of superintendents included as members of legislative sub-committees is related to their demeanor when interacting with lawmakers. The importance of the manner in which superintendents challenge legislators’ ideas during participation on sub-committees was highlighted by Superintendent C, who added,

Their method of communication is not finger pointing and yelling and screaming...talking down to...They do it in a very appropriate fashion...and as a result the same ones keep getting appointed because they’ve demonstrated the ability to work in adverse situations...very respectfully...very effectively...and very knowledgeable...So I think it’s critical that we maintain people at the table.

One concern expressed by Superintendent C was his perception of an apparent lack of participation or opportunity for participation among the vast majority of the state’s superintendents, thus leaving a void in terms of the available pool of superintendents with

experience interacting with legislators on state-level committees. He mentioned that a large percentage of the superintendents who have been considered influential state-wide have recently retired or are close to retirement, sharing this concern.

When the list is shortened by more than 50% of the ones who've really been tagged as knowledgeable...that means that other people haven't been given the opportunity or haven't taken advantage of the opportunity...You know if your legislators know you, they will recommend you...If they don't know who you are, why would they?

While the experiences Superintendent C shared regarding participation on legislative sub-committees were positive, Superintendent B discussed her encounter as a sub-committee member in a much different light. She explained her perception that the committee in which she was invited to serve as a member had no true chance to influence policy change.

That was one of the greatest disappointments of my experience of being asked to be a part of any type of state-level committee or organization committee...We received the agenda 24 hours before the meetings...You never had any input on that agenda...The Chairs invited who they wanted to come to the meetings that we had...We listened to presentations...There was never really an opportunity for dialogue and we never had an opportunity to come together and work as a committee...You sat there all day long and listened...There was no follow-up to any meeting whatsoever.

Testifying before legislators. Providing testimony before the legislature is another method identified by superintendent participants for influencing policy development. Each of the superintendents in this study noted that they had previously provided testimony before the House Public Education Committee and the Senate Education Committee. The participants shared that there were times when they chose on their own accord to testify for or against legislation, and there were also times when they were encouraged by colleagues or invited by an organization to testify. Superintendent A shared his perspective on the importance of superintendent testimony.

Testimony in front of committees is an extremely important piece of this...and you've got to be willing to be there...or there are circumstances where you just can't...it happens... emergencies... You've got to make sure that you've got somebody who can reflect the things that you were going to say...hopefully in the same kind of manner.

The importance of being prepared when testifying was also explained by Superintendent C.

You should be able to communicate all the critical data orally when you meet with them and if you ever testify in a hearing...you darn better be prepared to do that...because going back and checking is not an acceptable answer... You're not prepared... So every superintendent should know every critical fact off the top of their head about their district and he should be able to communicate that...articulate it quickly.

In addition, reflecting on her prior experiences of providing testimony, Superintendent B commented,

I've been invited to testify and then you sit in there and wait and when they open it to open testimony....they give you three minutes and you sign a card when you walk in the door....but your testifying on a bill....about a bill...that's what you are testifying on...and you're either for, against, or on...In the past when Grusendorf was there, if you put "against" a bill, he wouldn't even be there when you testified....so you learned to put "on" a bill....Eissler....you could be a little different.....He would take your "I'm against" and I will say that Eissler did not get up and walk out like some of the others have...He would pretty well stay....Shapiro would be very cordial...she would listen...be nice....and would no more listen to what you had to say than a fly on the moon....It was her way.

Superintendent B also reported how she went about making her testimony more meaningful for the legislators by creating a picture or story that lawmakers could visualize and to which they could potentially connect in order to create a lasting memory.

When I testify, I have my points...I don't go on and on and on... and I usually try to have a personal little story you can relate to.... You give them something that they can build a picture in their mind.

Utilizing various forms of communication. The data revealed that numerous methods of communication are utilized by superintendents when trying to influence

educational policy development. These forms of communication included letters, faxes, emails, phone calls, text messages, personal meetings, and group meetings. Some forms of communication were portrayed as more effective than others. Superintendent C noted that “generally I don’t send a lot of letters unless they requested information. You can send a letter, but it’s just not effective.” The type of communication vehicle used was noted by Superintendent C as dependent upon the rapport the superintendent had previously established with staff members and the nature and urgency of the situation.

During hearings or key information...if it’s urgent I’ll send them a text message if I have their cell number...if a comment comes up that should be clarified...I’ll be in the hearing and I’ll just send a text message to the appropriate staff member and they can choose to share it with the representative or not...that all comes about after you create relationships or else you don’t have their mobile phone.

In addition, the location of the superintendent in relation to Austin was mentioned as a factor in the type of communication employed. Regardless of the form of communication, Superintendent B stressed the significance of ensuring that all contact with legislators and their staffs be meaningful due to the vast amount of information they are forced to process.

I do a lot of emailing to the staff... I try to make sure I don’t ever send something that is not of value or importance...So it is important to them to the point that Grayson tells me “Every email you send to me I forward to Reese”....so I’ve developed that relationship and reputation....I don’t mess with fluff....I’m going to put all my time energy and effort into key things that truly make a difference.

Communication flows in both directions between superintendents and their legislators.

The need to understand the preferred communication methods of legislators was identified by Superintendent A as valuable information.

Telephone is another place...I know if Kelly calls me...that there’s something up because She doesn’t just call...She’s not much of a phone guy...She’s more of a face-to-face person...so when I see her...I’ve had her cell for years..and when I see her number coming up...well you know something is going on.

Understanding the timing of communication. When attempting to affect the creation of educational policy, the participants explained that superintendents must be aware of the timing of the policy development process and its impact on how and when they need to be communicating with legislators and their staff members. The respondents expressed that they work with legislators and their staff members during the interim between legislative sessions. They also stressed their effort to remain engaged with legislators and their staffs throughout the biannual legislative sessions. When discussing efforts to affect the generation of new education policy, Superintendent C stressed “If you’re waiting until the session, you are too late. The key is to work with legislators during the interim sessions”. The participants remarked that legislators are much more available in the interim, which allows superintendents to spend more time with lawmakers to establish rapport and to work cooperatively with the legislators in creating legislation. Superintendent A addressed the opportunity to build and maintain rapport during the interim.

A lot of people lose total communication with their legislators during the off-season, and if you are going to maintain a rapport and a relationship you cannot do that. So you’ve got to stay in touch whether it be by a simple email, whether it be by a phone call, whether it be by inviting them as part of a group of superintendents inviting them into the Service Center... You’ve got to stay communicative with those folks in non-legislative years.

Every superintendent clarified the difference in the nature of their interactions with legislators during a legislative session versus outside a session. Two participants described superintendents during a legislative session as being in “defense mode”. Superintendent B talked about the challenge of keeping up with the large volume of bills in order to provide legislators with feedback regarding the effects of proposed legislation on her school district.

The greatest challenge during the session is keeping up with all the bills that have been filed and being able to communicate with your legislator what the implications of the bill are going to be on your district....In terms of you having a plan or a proposal, that better be in place prior to the session...So you work on getting the right things in place that you think would make a more quality education for kids before the session starts....When the session starts you are trying to promote what you want but then you have to play defense and you have to see what's going on out there that's being filed to where you can respond and let your legislator know..."Do not support that bill, and this is why".

Superintendent A also added his perspective on the difference between superintendents' communication efforts inside and outside legislative sessions.

They are a lot more successful when they begin the process in the interim than they are when they have a bright idea right before the session begins, and the justification for that is if you are just thinking about it when the session starts, then you are too late... After the legislative session begins you are in defensive mode...During the interim you're in offensive mode.

Offering input during the development of legislation. Superintendents explained that they provide meaningful input during the process of developing new legislation. Respondents indicated they are influential in the initial stages of this process by bringing attention to changes that they believe need to be made to current legislation. Superintendent A expressed that it is easier for superintendents to contribute during the early phases of policy development if they have previously established a relationship with legislators and their staff prior to approaching them for help. "We have to have that conduit...that relationship again...with our legislator and that Chief of Staff to a point of being able to sit down with them and helping them understand what it is that we need".

Participants shared that they did not have the expertise needed to draft legislation in the required language. Therefore, they explained that they sought assistance from resources with this skill. Superintendent C described the process that he believed many superintendents follow when attempting to get legislation created.

I think that there are a few superintendents who could do that...most of them use a consultant or will take the concept to a legislator and they will get it done through legislative council...but generally...there are very few superintendents who have put together a bill...as far as drafting legislation, you could draft the intent, you can draft the major parts...the critical attributes of the bill...but as far as putting it into legislative language..I'd get an expert...

Once a bill is prepared with the appropriate language, respondents explained superintendents sometimes assist in finding a lawmaker to carry the bill. Superintendent C described this aspect of the process and stressed the importance of ensuring that the bill's language matches the intent originally proposed.

You get a legislator to carry it and they're going to take it to legislative counsel and have them rewrite it anyway....then review it to make sure that it actually...sometimes the spirit of the law and the letter of the law don't meet.

The process for getting legislation passed does not end for the superintendent once a bill has been drafted and a legislator has agreed to carry the bill. Superintendent B articulated the need for the superintendent to remain engaged throughout the process.

Once a bill has been....a concept has been created....and you asked and found someone to carry that concept and they've gotten the bill drafted...then it's going to go through committee and that's when you need to be here for the hearings and listen to what's going on and during that hearing process is when amendments could be filed making the changes...and you need to be there to hear those amendments.

Facilitating Interactions Between Legislators

Superintendent participants reported that in some situations they attempted to facilitate interactions between their representative and other legislators, particularly legislators on the House Public Education Committee and Senate Education Committee. The data indicated that the respondents perceived legislators to have closer relationships with one another than they believed those outside the Capitol typically assume. When discussing strategies he has used to get his Representative to exert influence with another

legislator who does not represent his school district, Superintendent A remarked “These people know each other pretty well. Their aides know each other extremely well... if you’ve got a relationship with your legislator and their Chief of Staff, then you can go to them and do it that way”.

Also, respondents stressed the importance of following an appropriate communication protocol when superintendents attempt to influence the policy decisions of legislators who do not represent their geographic location. Superintendent C described this protocol.

You always go to your state legislators first...explain it to them...and you say... You know, what I really want to do is to share this information with the members on the House Public Education Committee but I wanted to give it to you first in case one of them has a question...and if you’d like to share it..that would be great too.

Superintendent B also shared the importance of providing her legislators with an explanation of the impacts that education policies have on school districts in other areas of the state. She noted that this knowledge can help to arm legislators with vital information that can assist a lawmaker in being influential when discussing a particular policy with their colleagues that represent other school districts.

I always try to then give them implications for other districts because they’re going to be talking to other people....and sometimes they need to say “Look, let me show you what it will do to my school district... Well if you think we are the only one...let me show you what it would do to Shiner....and he’s talking to the Shiner Rep.

Participating as Members of Professional Organizations

While superintendent interviewees said they influence the creation of educational policy through their interactions with lawmakers and their legislative staff members, their

responses also suggest that superintendents influence educational policy development by participating as members of professional organizations. Superintendent A pointed out the impact that associations' governmental relations personnel can have when attempting to influence legislators.

We have hired lobbyists..and when I say we...Your organizations all have people who fit that mold...and they don't call themselves lobbyists...but governmental relations people...and oftentimes it's through those people that you can reach out across from committee to individual legislator...committee to committee....individual to individual...that way.

According to the participants, there are numerous organizations that superintendents join depending on their ability to sway the decisions of policymakers. They explained that many associations have formed to promote educational agendas that are aimed to support the interests of a particular segment of school districts. For example, superintendents reported that there are associations dedicated to representing school districts regarding factors such as property wealth and student enrollment. Organizations mentioned by the respondents included the Texas School Coalition, the Equity Center, the Texas School Alliance, the Coalition of Contributing Schools, and the Texas Association of Community Schools.

In addition to these organizations that lobby for certain school districts that share a common concern, the participants agree that the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) is most commonly associated with superintendent collegiality and efforts to present a united case for the advancement of preferred educational policies. Thus, membership in their professional organizations, particularly TASA, emerged as important. Through their involvement with TASA, superintendents expressed they have the opportunity to influence policy development in several ways. They can work

collaboratively with fellow superintendents as members of TASA committees, work with representatives of TASA's leadership team in the development of policy proposals, and assist by networking through TASA to influence legislators.

Respondents shared the need for superintendents to not merely be members of TASA, but to be active contributors to the mission of TASA. Superintendent C described the importance of being an engaged participant. "Just joining TASA doesn't do anything...getting actively engaged in TASA...attending the meetings...trying to get on committees, truly adding value to TASA as a superintendent enables TASA to add value to you as a superintendent". One avenue for superintendents to add value as members of TASA was said to be through serving in the association's mentorship program. The importance of the mentorship program in the preparation of new school district leaders was addressed by Superintendent A.

There is a mentorship that is required from TASA for new superintendents... Paired with somebody who's been through the training as a mentor...and part of that process is the advocacy aspect of it.... one of the things that Sydney did for me, my predecessor....She brought me down and I met a lot of people...I'm going to do that same thing for my replacement...Other people are going to do that same thing for theirs....That mentorship is extremely valuable.

Through TASA, participants also claimed superintendents have the opportunity to serve on the association's legislative committees. They explained that this group of school superintendents who serve on TASA's legislative committee collaborates with TASA's leadership team during a few meetings each year to develop recommendations the group believes to be in the best interest of Texas public schools in general.

Superintendent A described his experience as a TASA legislative committee member.

There is a legislative committee that is formed...It's somewhat of a rotating thing and through that and through Amy Beneski and Casey McCreary and Ramiro Canales, those folks, through them and through David Thompson and through

Lynn Moak, and through Beaman Floyd, he's another advocate for TASA... Those folks we get together two or three times a year and we talk and we advocate... We try to figure out what it is that we need and put it in the simplest forms and then all that goes out to everyone... and TASA always has somebody that is willing and ready and able to testify about this or that.

In developing a network of superintendents, TASA is able to identify which school leaders have formed prominent relationships with particular members of the legislature. With this knowledge, the organization is selective in inviting specific superintendents to advocate for the association's policy positions. Superintendent A spoke to this practice.

TASA does that very well with their people or they grab people who they know have influence over a particular legislator and they'll say... "Come on"...and ask them to go and do that...that's kind of how that thing works.

Enlisting Local Stakeholders

In addition to influencing education policy development through direct interaction with legislators and their staff members, and by participating as members of professional organizations, superintendents can also influence the creation of legislation by enlisting their local stakeholders. According to the data, superintendents identify important stakeholders as including local community members (particularly mothers of students in the school district), teachers and other staff members, and School Board members in their school districts. The superintendents expressed the need to ensure their stakeholders are fully informed so these stakeholders may effectively advocate with lawmakers regarding the development of educational policies. Superintendent C shared his belief that superintendents must engage their local communities to a higher degree than has previously been attempted by many school leaders, saying,

We haven't engaged our parents... We haven't engaged our communities... We haven't engaged our staff... Find out how many of your staff members voted... If it's more than 30% that voted in the election... you're a lucky man... If we don't vote... if we don't talk to legislators... if we don't talk to people in the grocery stores and beauty salons, barber shops, little league games, basketball games... about getting engaged... about how all this in your public school district can go away... or be minimized or your kids can be significantly impacted.. then we haven't done our job as superintendents... We should always be in the pulpit or on the stump any time we are around at least two people in our district... We ought to know who the influential people are and we ought to contact them because they influence 10 other people and each one of them 10 other people... Pretty soon you have a grass roots movement and your legislator knows that when you speak... you're speaking for hundreds if not thousands of people.

Superintendent B also noted the need for school leaders to involve their communities, a concept she identified as a recent revelation for many superintendents who realized they could not change the current system by acting alone.

I think it is equally as important for the superintendents to be involved with the community... their school community because of the power of the grass roots... The superintendent can't do it alone... I think what has been the turning point for what is transpiring at this point in time... is in the past superintendents have tried to do it themselves and that's not going to work... It's a grass root.

Participants described that they disseminate information in order to educate their local community, teachers, and School Board members regarding legislative candidates and current and proposed legislation. Respondents also shared that they facilitate opportunities for interaction between their local community members and their legislators to help in influencing educational policy development.

Educating the Local Community on Legislative Candidates

Participants described their responsibility to educate local stakeholders regarding legislative candidates running for office. Superintendent B shared that there was a time when superintendents felt as though they could not express an opinion about which

candidates supported policies that were positive for public education. “We’ve got to get away from that mindset from years ago when Grusendorf threatened us if we did anything pertaining to politics. We have rights and we will do it the right way”.

Superintendent C also provided a description of superintendents’ wariness to become involved in the political process.

It’s something I think you’ll find most superintendents shy away from and they’ll probably tell you they do a few things, but they don’t want it printed... Superintendents are under the glass and you never want to do anything that hurts your district...If you back the wrong horse and somebody finds you worked hard against them...is that going to come back and hurt you and your district...So I think you have to be very, very careful.

Superintendent A explained that he does put information in writing that is factual about candidates for his local community to consider, yet he is also careful not to outwardly advocate in writing for the selection of any one candidate.

I send a community newsletter out about every month...three weeks to a month... and I will on occasions talk politically in that little newsletter about this candidate or that...or if you have any questions...please see me....this gentlemen has done a good job advocating for our situation...those kind of things.

Because superintendents are concerned with the negative effects of outwardly supporting certain candidates, they choose to exert influence in ways that are less noticeable. According to Superintendent A, “You do it with your voters in a very low key manner”. Such a “low key” approach was described by Superintendent C,

I think the key is...make up your mind that you cast your vote, you tell anyone word of mouth why they should vote for a certain person...but if you start putting it down in email and you start taking an active role as a true activist...then your actions are going to have an adverse effect on your district...not acceptable... Most superintendents are very comfortable telling people “Spend a lot of time reviewing all the information about all the candidates and then vote for the one you believe is the one who supports public education”...I think that’s what you have to say.

Educating the Local Community on Current and Proposed Legislation

The participants expressed that it is not enough for superintendents to educate their local communities about legislative candidates at election time. The need for local stakeholders to be aware of the impact that current legislation is having on the operation of their school district, as well as the expected results of proposed legislation, was also identified by respondents. Respondents expressed that, during the interim and throughout legislative sessions, school leaders must keep their communities informed of policy implications. Superintendent B explained how she educated her community, saying

I think if you are informing people of the environment and what the implications are....and encourage them to contact their legislators whether by letter, by phone call, email, or whatever...that's what I would try to do... We have parent meetings...There have been a couple of times when I have called parent meetings just to talk about legislative issues...and let me tell you what this is about and what it can do... so beginning of school, parent night...I have meetings then where I'm in the auditorium and I have 10 minutes of their time and things like that.

Superintendent A also described his belief in the importance of educating the community regarding legislative policies. He discussed students' moms, the stakeholder group he considers to be the most powerful interest group in the entire state when they are educated and unite behind a common cause.

The most powerful group in the state of Texas is moms...This whole issue right now about testing and what's going on there...and there is a group of moms who are out to try to set that thing straight about how much testing is going on...Somebody has named them...tongue in cheek...Mothers Against Drunk Testing...The grassroots movement is extremely important...The only way in my little community...and in most places is you've got to educate them...through letters...through newsletters...through discussions...through meetings that you might have....Get them educated.

Superintendents A and C also described two vastly different strategies for enlisting local support by educating stakeholders regarding legislation. Superintendent C

held monthly meetings with a group of approximately 50 citizens selected because they were perceived by the school administration as influential in the local community. He reported the goal of educating this group was to empower them with knowledge about their local school district. The group was given vast amounts of data on the district's successes and challenges and members were provided an open forum in which they could ask questions and request data on areas of the school district they believed were important. In addition to educating the community group on the district data, this superintendent and his team also trained the community members regarding the proper manner in which to advocate with legislators and their staffs. He described his reasoning for utilizing this approach to educating community members on legislation, saying,

You never really want to tell people what to say... You want to tell them how to say what they need to say about the importance of the school district or about funding or about curriculum.... Anytime you start telling people what they should say you lose them... You empower them by giving them information and training them how to use the information they have to influence policy or influence legislators... You cannot assume that people know how to communicate effectively in writing or in oral language in a policy environment to legislators.

While Superintendent C noted the importance of allowing citizens to decide what is important to them when advocating with lawmakers, Superintendent A explained that there are occasions where school leaders take a more active role to affect legislation that is under consideration by lawmakers. He described previous circumstances in which harmful educational legislation was set to be discussed by legislative committees and how he and other superintendents ignited a strong show of support against a policy being considered by legislators.

You can turn the dogs loose... Typically you don't do it on your own guy... You can... but if it's the chair of some committee... I even saw it happen this last time when we knew what was coming... and the guy showed up the next day and said "My people are killing me on this thing... I cannot advocate for this... I cannot

move forward for this”...So getting word out...having that network available...Getting their email addresses and some verbiage in people’s hands...It’s important to them what their people...what their voters are saying.

Educating the School Staff

Along with educating the local community, the participants shared that superintendents keep their school staffs informed as well. The respondents described different manners of updating their staffs on legislative candidates. Superintendent A described the strategy he utilizes to educating the people working in his school district, saying,

I remind my staff about voting...I don’t ever get on an email and say this is who you need to vote for, but they know if they want to come see me...that we’ll talk about that and I can give them some reasons.

However, Superintendent B reported tactics for educating her school staff that were much more involved. First, she explained that she assisted in ensuring that her staff members were registered to vote. Then, she articulated that she joined forces with several superintendent colleagues in her area to create a survey for legislative candidates to identify their views on public education, describing her efforts below.

We decided the first thing we would do is make sure our staff is registered to vote and so we got all of our staff registered to vote... Then a group of superintendents got together and created a survey that we gave to every candidate that was running in our area...and it was all education questions...“Where do you stand on these issues”.

According to Superintendent B, she then worked with this group of superintendents to compile the candidate information gleaned from the survey they administered and published the findings in their local newspapers. After obtaining the survey results, Superintendent B said she requested the chance to speak at the end of faculty meetings on each of her district’s campuses.

I said “I am going to be there and any teacher that wants to stay on their own time can stay and we are going to talk about political candidates and the election...and so I went around to every campus...At the end of the faculty meeting the principal said.. “The meeting is over...Our superintendent is here and anyone that is interested in candidates and things of that nature and would like to stay, she’ll be happy to talk with you.”....All campuses, I did not have one staff member leave...and I talked to them about the candidates...what their platform was...and they sat there at the end and I said “And if you want to know who I’m voting for, I’ll be happy to tell you”...and they said “Yes!”.

Superintendent B explained the reason she placed great importance on information being made available to teachers regarding legislative candidates and education legislation being considered by lawmakers. She claimed that parents often trust what they are being told by their child’s teachers more than they believe what other school personnel tell them. Therefore, she asserted that it was imperative that her teaching staff be educated on legislative candidates and educational policies and encouraged to share these issues with others in the community.

Parents trust the teacher much more than they do the principal or the superintendent...well...You need to get your teachers informed so they are able to communicate...So to me that has been a key piece...Make sure my staff understands the issues and then encourage them to share those issues...So when questioned...They know what’s going on and they can respond...I’ve even done special meetings where I go to the faculty meetings during the session and I will let staff know....These are the issues that are on the table and I want to give you the pros and the cons...and I do not give an opinion at that point in time...or when bills have been filed, a lot of times we’ll look at some of those bills that I know will have a direct impact on my staff and I will say “This bill has been filed by such and such...This is what this bill will do.”....and I leave it there...no opinion, no nothing, and that is perfectly within the confines of law....You can share anything that is factual...and you can put it on the school email if it is factual...You just can’t give an opinion...and so I just try to keep my staff informed.

Educating School Board Members

Along with educating the community and district staff, participants also shared the need to educate their School Board members in order to influence the development of

educational policy. According to Superintendent A, it is important to educate these elected officials because “Board Members represent the community....so if you want to empower your board...you’ve got to educate them”. When asked about keeping Board members informed, Superintendent B added, “Educate, educate, educate...and that’s what I’ve been doing with mine...and that’s why I am so very blessed because mine are so very supportive”.

The participants all noted that their Board Members had varying levels of comfort with taking an involved role in advocating with legislators, and as a result, superintendents’ approaches to working with Board members who might be disinterested or uncomfortable are different than when working with members who are eager and willing to learn. Superintendent B shared that her current Board members preferred not to take an active part in advocating on behalf of her school district with lawmakers.

I don’t have those that are interested in doing that.... They pretty much let me do that...but you know there are some school districts that have board members who want to get involved and can get involved...but mine pretty much let me do that...So it’s going to be up to your Board.

Similarly, Superintendent C explained that while some of his Board members were not comfortable serving as “extensions to the legislators”, the district leader must keep the entire Board updated on any interaction the superintendent has with legislators.

They need to be engaged as extensions to the legislators because they are both elected officials...and we were fairly effective...A lot of them were not comfortable doing that so I didn’t force the issue...I just kept them informed...They just need to be very informed..and if you take an action like a meeting where you met with your legislator, they need to get a copy of that information...so that way they know what you are telling the legislator...They know what you are telling the education committee...They’re informed and they don’t get surprised.

The data also suggests that it is necessary for the superintendent to know the Board's perspective regarding the time and resources spent by the superintendent in an effort to influence legislative decisions. Superintendent A revealed the value of educating the Board to understand the significance of the superintendent staying involved in the development of education policy at the state level.

You've got to recognize what your Board's wishes are for you in this situation too...because there are people out there who do not want their people overly involved...do not want them out of the district...My group understands...but I have friends who would be way more involved if they could be but their Board will not so.....You know this is not just about me saying this is important...It's about convincing the community and the community representatives...This is an extremely important piece...We spend a lot of money every year..me traveling back and forth down here...but we got lots of money to lose if we don't.

Facilitating Interactions Between Legislators and the Community

In addition to the superintendent directly educating local stakeholders on legislative candidates and policies, according to the data, the district leader can also indirectly affect their perspectives and those of legislators by facilitating interactions between local constituents and their Representatives and Senators. Respondents described how they have organized opportunities for their legislators to interact with local stakeholders. These opportunities for interaction include legislator visits to school district campuses to engage directly with students in activities such as reading to elementary students. Invitations to special celebratory events, including graduations and recognitions of state championship teams were described by participants as well. The value of including legislators in celebratory occasions was illustrated by Superintendent B.

Whenever we have a special event, I always invite my legislators...and it is not so much to talk about the politics...but it is to get them in front of the community to where there is a connection with my community.

The data suggests that when attempting to bring the community and legislators together, an open invitation may not be the best strategy, as Superintendent C pointed out in his description of tactics he had employed to bring lawmakers and local stakeholder together.

The best way...you know you've seen the old saying "When you invite everybody...nobody gets invited"...We did very targeted invitations...If we wanted to have a town hall meeting we sent invitations to leaders across the community...brought them in...That way if others showed up we didn't say anything...but we wanted key leaders.

Superintendent C also spoke about efforts his district took to bring community members to Austin to meet with legislators at the Capitol.

We would go to each legislative office...set it up in advance...let them see the staff...meet the staff and meet with the legislators...So we did it in a very targeted fashion because you don't want everyone calling legislators and you don't want everyone writing legislators...but any way you can get them in to meet individually with people with specific ties to the district and to the community the better off you are.

While Superintendents B and C expressed confidence in the initiatives they put in place to create opportunities for interaction between their local stakeholders and legislators, Superintendent A explained that he perceived this as an area of weakness for himself.

Yeah, I'm probably not very good at that...The make-up of my community is very unique...extreme blue-collar...extreme disinterest in a lot of ways...so what we have done is we have had some forums... If I were in a different setting, I think I could do that in a positive fashion by getting them involved just in community activities...Legislators want to, if their schedule allows, to be there to shake hands and kiss the babies and all those kinds of things....So to me, that's probably the way that I would approach that.

Research Question 2

How do Texas legislators perceive Texas superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

The second research question in this study aimed to determine how Texas legislators perceive Texas superintendents influence educational policy development. Analysis of the data provided by legislators participating in this study revealed three major themes. These themes included superintendents interacting with legislators and their staff members, superintendents participating as members of professional organizations, and superintendents enlisting local stakeholders.

Interacting with Legislators and Their Staff Members

According to legislators, when trying to influence their decisions, superintendents interact directly with lawmakers and members of their staffs. The legislators interviewed described that superintendents select environments in which to interact with legislators and also establish relationships with their staff members in an effort to affect the creation of educational policy. The lawmakers also said that superintendents provide legislators and their staff members with information by serving on legislative sub-committees and testifying before legislators. The respondents discussed various forms of communication utilized by school leaders when they contact legislators in an effort to impact the development of policy. Furthermore, the participants noted that the manner in which superintendents communicate with them is dependent on the timing of their interactions in relation to legislative sessions. Finally, lawmakers in this study reported that

superintendents make themselves available to legislators at critical times when the Representatives need information to inform their policy decisions.

Selecting Environments Where Interactions Occur

Participants described the various environments in which superintendents and legislators interact with one another when the school leader is trying to influence educational policy development. The lawmakers reported that the settings in which they came into contact with superintendents were determined by both groups. They identified formal and informal locations in which superintendents engaged with legislators. The legislators said they are invited by the school district chief executives to meet at their administrative offices. Also, lawmakers identified visits to school campuses as another formal venue where they often encounter the superintendent. Legislator B shared the efforts to which one of his superintendents goes to ensure they interact whenever the representative visits the school district.

I would say that whether he is conscious of it or not, it is rare that I make a visit to BISD that the superintendent isn't in the room...I think he probably is pretty conscious of that...I suspect there are standing orders that if any... You know if I am scheduled to speak to 5th graders at the library...that he wants to know about it and he's going to be there....No one has ever told me that, but I'd bet...He's good about it.

In addition, the respondents reported that superintendents visit legislators at both the lawmakers' district offices as well as their offices in the Capitol. Further, it was mentioned that the two parties at times interact at school organized ceremonies such as high school graduations.

There were also informal settings mentioned by the participants when describing the environments in which they interact with superintendents. These locations and events

included homecoming and Christmas parades, Rotary and Lions' Club meetings.

Legislator B described that his experience interacting with superintendents in informal places, such as meeting for coffee, were often similar to his encounters with school leaders in their offices. "It's really no different than when it's somebody coming in to my office for a formal meeting...it's still the same sort of "we need this, we need this, we need this...don't do this, this and this". Legislator B also shared that he had informal meetings with another superintendent that he viewed much differently than the previous example.

I think my superintendent is crafty about....ok, here is what he does....crafty is the wrong word...he's strategic...He invites me to do stuff he knows I'll love... So he has this leadership group of high school juniors and seniors who he brings to the Capitol for a tour every year and he has me come and speak to them because there are 100 fresh faced kids whose future is limitless for them....and he knows I love interacting with them, but in doing so he's showcasing to me...and by the way, he's always there...He guides these kids through the Capitol....He's demonstrating to me what makes his district a special school district...So that's not a formal advocacy effort on his part, but it is effective advocacy....and he doesn't use those opportunities to advocate for any specific outcome...He's just showing off...It's good...It's a smart idea.

Establishing Relationships with Legislative Staff Members

During the legislator interviews, the participants referred to the important role their staffs serve as a conduit between the superintendent and the legislator. The staff was described as typically being much more accessible than lawmakers to superintendents. Legislators stressed the importance of establishing a strong relationship with their staff members. Respondents explained that superintendents in the areas they represent spend more time talking with their staff members than with them when trying to influence the development of educational policy. Legislator A emphasized the

superintendent's relationship with members of her staff, describing it as "equally important" to the relationship of the superintendent and the legislator.

Get to know the legislator's staff because sometimes we are impossible to track down because we are 50 million places at once...but the staff person you usually can and they're the person doing the research that's going to turn around and say to me... "Your superintendent called and he said to be sure and check in to blah blah blah"... and so I would say building a relationship with staff...and not to think of that as a lesser relationship...It's a very important relationship...in fact it's equally important.

Providing Legislators and Their Staff Members with Information

Legislators reported that superintendents provide them with information for various reasons. At times, the school leader does so in an effort to support the case for the alteration of a current policy or the generation of a new policy. On other occasions, legislators or their staff members may request information from the superintendent to assist in their own research. Regardless of the reason the data is gathered, providing information was cited as a key aspect to enabling superintendents to influence legislators in the development of educational policy.

According to the participants, legislators receive information from superintendents in a variety of ways. School leaders were said to provide lawmakers with information by serving on legislative sub-committees and by testifying before the legislature. Respondents also identified various forms of communication utilized by superintendents to provide them with information, and they also addressed the importance that the timing of communication can play when superintendents are attempting to influence policy decisions.

Serving on legislative sub-committees. The respondents explained that superintendents are occasionally selected by legislative leadership to serve alongside

lawmakers on legislative sub-committees. According to the participants, those superintendents who serve on these special sub-committees are provided greater exposure to legislators and have the opportunity to establish stronger relationships than school leaders who do not have the chance to work on such committees. Legislator A pointed out the benefits for superintendents who serve on legislative sub-committees, saying,

Perhaps the most important thing that occurs in that process... Your world is about relationships... Our world is about relationships, and the success of the influence is based upon the degree that you have developed that relationship over time... and committees provide a way to do that... to develop relationships.

Legislator B shared that while the superintendents who are included as members of legislative sub-committees have the chance to influence the specific policy areas analyzed by that particular committee, he further explained the lasting effects that some superintendents realize after participating on these committees, claiming,

For the individual superintendents who get to serve on it... it's a chance to really elevate their ability to influence... their individual ability to influence things... and it has a lasting effect because they get inside this building... they learn... they develop relationships around here that are more than just perfunctory... and they learn what makes us tick... figure out what makes this building tick... and it gives them an ability to influence public policy on things even unrelated to the work of the committee... and in a lasting way beyond the life of the committee.

Testifying before legislators. Providing testimony before the House Public Education Committee or the Senate Education Committee was another method in which lawmakers said superintendents influence educational policy development. The respondents noted that superintendents play an important role in legislators' work by providing them with valuable information during testimony. Legislator B described superintendents as the "go-to resource for legislators trying to figure out the impact of different public policies on public education". In addition, Legislator A addressed how

superintendents have previously helped lawmakers to avoid enacting legislation that would have created damaging, unintended consequences for school districts.

It's extremely important if I'm going to create legislation for any area...for any subject...that you have the stakeholders who are going to be affected by what you are doing at the table to tell you...hopefully in advance...what some of the unintended consequences might be...particularly if you are making major changes...You've got to have people who are keeping you centered... keeping you realistic about what it is that you are thinking about doing.

Utilizing various forms of communication. According to the respondents, superintendents utilize several forms of communication in contacting them when trying to influence the development of education policy. They identified letters, emails, phone calls, texting, and face-to-face meetings as the methods superintendents use. Some forms of communication were recognized as more effective than others. Legislator A provided this cautionary tale based on her experience.

In the old days people wrote letters...That's completely passé but the second thing would be email...but you have to be really careful with email...Probably the best thing is a phone call...Texting is not a bad idea but sometimes it's just a matter of saying please call me...Emails...all of our email...all of their emails are subject to Open Records...so again it would just be something that...People can get a hold of things like that and just turn it into something it's not.

Legislator B made similar observations when asked whether he considered certain forms of communication employed by superintendents to be more influential than others.

Certainly face to face is more influential than a letter. Between face to face and a phone call...no, it's the same...I don't think that...I think sometimes a phone call...because a phone call is often unscheduled and can be just in time...sometimes a phone call is best because it's right when I need it...I get phone calls on my cell phone when we are on the floor debating a bill you know... and that's sometimes really valuable.

Furthermore, Legislator C supported the idea that phone calls may be the most powerful form of communication superintendents utilize when working with lawmakers.

My cell phone is most common in my case...emails work well...emails and direct calls are far better than ...a letter is OK...we get those some...I don't know that one is more effective than the other....If it's urgent I hope they would call me.

Understanding the timing of communication. Legislators acknowledged that superintendents understand the importance timing plays in their communication with lawmakers during legislative sessions and during the interim. The amount of communication and the purpose for that communication were factors identified by respondents as highly dependent on whether the legislature was in session. Participants expressed that superintendents engage with them during the interim when they want to work collaboratively to develop new policies. According to Legislator A, "Legislation is developed in the interim. We have more time and there is not the pressure. In terms of truly being a partner in developing policy...that is usually best obtained in between the sessions". Legislator C agreed when speaking of his experiences working with school leaders, saying "Most policy is the result of discussions that have happened before the session".

Based on legislator responses, communication that occurs during legislative sessions between superintendents and legislators is often more reactive in nature and also more time sensitive. Legislator A explained, "What happens when we get into session is things just move very quickly and very unpredictably. Legislator C gave similar feedback, saying "by the time we go to session...at that point it's just a matter of putting out the fires that flame up".

When legislators and their offices communicate with superintendents to request information, Legislator A expressed that it is imperative that the superintendent ensure the school district is responsive and provides accurate data in a timely manner. She

disclosed that school leaders who are not quick to respond risk damaging their relationship with the legislator and provided an example of such a situation.

A few years back...we needed some information about something and my Chief of Staff was trying to get that from a certain school district and they were not responsive to our request and it made it very hard for us to make an informed decision and we did eventually get the data from another school district...but if somebody calls and needs information...for example a staff person from a legislator's office...It's just extremely important to be responsive to that because if they're reaching out and asking questions, that's not to be ignored.

Being available. The participants expressed that superintendents are available to lawmakers as a resource for information, particularly at critical times when decisions are being made during a legislative session. Two of the participants addressed that their superintendents have had the chance to be influential during educational policy development because the school leaders have gone to great extents to ensure they were available when the legislators needed information from them. Respondents shared that they have on many occasions needed to contact their superintendents late at night during the legislative session. Legislator A explained, "It happens quickly. I sometimes have to call at 9 p.m. because that's when we are discussing the particular bill". She explained that she has called her superintendents at these times to help her gauge the impact that potential legislation would have on the school districts she represents.

I think it's important to develop the kind of relationship as a superintendent with your legislator that is a cell phone, texting relationship...because I know that when I am sitting on the house floor...and of course they can look at us live streaming....that if I get a call from my superintendent, which many of us do...or they're there in the gallery...We're going to take that call, and vice versa...because I'm going to call my superintendent and so "OK, I've got this legislation, what does this do to Wimberley".

The need to discuss issues at unusual times was also specified by Legislator C.

They need to have your contact so if it's 1 o'clock in the morning and something is on the floor of the House and they need to call you, they can call you...because

that literally happens here where there will be an amendment at 10 or 11 at night and you need to get ahold of your school guy and say...“How does this affect your district?”...and you need to have the relationship that he’s got your cell phone number and you’ve got his so you can talk to each other.

Legislator B explained that he also has often contacted his superintendents to request information quickly that helped him to gather the information needed to make educational policy decisions. He referred to this type of information as being the “just in time” information he needed to make informed decisions. Legislator C further contributed to the idea that legislators need to have access to their superintendents quickly when policy decisions are being made. He expressed that in these scenarios he would contact those superintendents that he knew he could count on to respond quickly and that his faith in them allowed them the opportunity to better serve their districts’ interests.

What I want is access to them when I have a pressing question...and I don’t mean an hour from now...sometimes you’ve got 20 minutes... It’s critical to have that kind of relationship if you want to represent your school districts well.

Participating as Members of Professional Organizations

A second theme that emerged from the data provided by legislative participants was that superintendents influence educational policy development by active participation as members of professional organizations. While there was brief mention of a variety of associations that superintendents work through to influence the development of education policy, including the Texas Association of Midsize Schools (TAMS), the Texas Association of Rural Schools (TARS), the Equity Center, and the Texas School Coalition, by far the most prevalent group discussed was the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA). Participants identified two strategies as critical for

superintendents when working through their associations to create policy change.

Respondents noted that superintendents must be actively involved in the leadership of their organization and that they must remain unified in the message that members of the association share with lawmakers for their participation as a part of the organization to produce meaningful results.

According to the legislators, superintendents who are influential in policy development as contributors in a professional organization are actively engaged as constituents of the group's leadership. Legislator A stressed the need for the chief executive of the school district to be "involved and be active....be a part of the leadership team". With their responsibilities to manage the operations inside their school districts, Legislator B pointed out that superintendents are challenged to remain informed on the proceedings taking place in the legislature. Participants shared their perceptions that superintendents serving in leadership roles in their professional organizations are able to remain more informed and more effectively take action to try to influence the current legislative issues impacting their school districts.

While respondents accentuated that superintendents who are actively involved in their professional association can be influential, they also agreed on the need for cohesion among the superintendents in an organization when lobbying the legislature. The legislators mentioned that superintendents are typically more likely to present a united stance on an issue like state testing and accountability than they are on the issue of school district funding. Legislator C cited the need for superintendents to be cautious about straying from an association's official message, saying,

Superintendents should be very cautious about branching off from their association...If you can stay with the association's position at all, you ought to

stay with them because once you start brining mixed messages to the legislature... it usually goes downhill.

However, Superintendent B expressed concerns about what he considered to be too many school leaders telling him the same thing regarding educational issues.

It's more effective when y'all are united on the body... Though I start to feeling like what I'm hearing is sort of a dumbed down version of what everybody really thinks because they had to find a lowest common denominator on which they could all agree... but I kind of fear telling you that because the best advice any superintendent gives me individually is their most candid advice... not their taking one for the team advice... So on one hand it's more impactful on the legislature at large when y'all present a united front... on the other hand... I personally am more likely to tune that out and am most interested when somebody tells me something new and unusual.

Enlisting Local Stakeholders

The third major theme that emerged from the data was that superintendents enlist their local stakeholders when attempting to influence the development of educational policy. The stakeholders primarily referenced by the legislative participants were parents of students enrolled in school districts. The lawmakers involved in this study referred to superintendents educating community members regarding legislative candidates as a tactic for influencing the development of educational policies. They also pointed out that superintendents facilitate interactions between legislators and community members as a strategy for effecting policy creation.

Educating the Local Community on Legislative Candidates

According to the participants, superintendents educate their local communities by informing them of candidates' views on educational issues prior to elections. The participants all warned that school leaders should do so cautiously, even when their

support is given in a manner considered both legal and ethical. Legislator C said, “It’s pretty dangerous for a superintendent to take a role in trying to get a State Representative elected for example. They do that. I know they do that. They need to do so very cautiously”. The perception was shared by Legislator A that more superintendents seem to be getting involved with legislative elections than in previous years. She revealed her thoughts that increased activism on the part of superintendents may be due to concerns regarding recent legislation that has significantly impacted school districts.

I would say that generally speaking in the old days they didn’t...generally speaking, because it was considered a bit risky but I think as of late you’ve seen more of that...more involvement...and perhaps that is due to frustration with the policies that are being created.

Facilitating Interactions Between Legislators and the Community

When attempting to make a case for lawmakers to consider policy change, the participants noted that facilitating interactions between legislators and the community was an important strategy that superintendents employ. According to Legislator A, “There are many opportunities for that and superintendents should look for ways to engage legislators with the community”. The legislators described activities their superintendents had facilitated to bring them in touch with their communities. These functions included visits to elementary schools to read to children, speaking at graduations, and attending open houses, anniversaries and other celebratory events in the school districts. Legislator A highlighted the value of getting legislators to physically visit campuses. She believed this to be one of the most influential avenues for superintendents to enlighten legislators regarding the significant impact school districts are making in the lives of children.

The more that the superintendents can get their legislator or Senator into the schools for things from low-key events to like I said... speaking at graduation or whatever would be appropriate along those lines, then I think the better off we all are because I think they will be favorably impressed.

Also, legislators identified opportunities previously provided by their superintendents to discuss legislative issues with their communities, particularly in the form of public forums. Legislator B provided a specific example of a community forum designed by a superintendent in his district that the lawmaker considered to be an extremely meaningful experience.

They got each of three legislators who represent part of BISD to come first to a briefing with the School Board and senior staff in a private room for...I think we spent an hour going through the BISD legislative agenda...Immediately after that we walked out onto the stage of the performing arts center at the high school and basically did a town hall meeting...So each of us along with one trustee and the superintendent took questions from a moderator that had been submitted in advance on their website and there were about 200 people there from the community to see it...They had spent a lot of energy promoting it in advance...Most of the people in the audience were teachers but some were active parents...but they had invited everybody.

Research Question 3

What commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators in regard to how superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

A review of the findings obtained from the first two research questions in this study provide the information necessary to determine the commonalities and differences between the perceptions of the participating superintendents and legislators. Table 4.1 provides a visual representation of the superintendent and legislator participants'

perceptions of the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policy.

Strategies	Superintendents	Legislators
Interacting with Legislators and Their Staff Members		
Selecting Environments Where Interactions Occur	X	X
Getting to Know Legislators Early	X	
Showing Respect for the Legislators	X	
Being Available	X	X
Establishing Relationships with Legislative Staff Members	X	X
Serving on Legislative Sub-Committees	X	X
Testifying Before Legislators	X	X
Utilizing Various Forms of Communication	X	X
Understanding the Timing of Communication	X	X
Offering Input During the Development of Legislation	X	
Facilitating Interactions Between Legislators	X	
Participating as Members of Professional Organizations		
Actively Participating	X	X
Presenting a Unified Voice		X
Mentoring Colleagues	X	
Enlisting Local Stakeholders		
Educating Local Community on Legislative Candidates	X	X
Educating Local Community on Current and Proposed Legislation	X	
Educating School Staff	X	
Educating School Board Members	X	
Facilitating Interactions Between Legislators and the Community	X	X

Table 4.1: Comparison of Strategies Identified by Participants

Commonalities Between Superintendent and Legislator Perceptions

A review of the participants' responses to the first two research questions in this study revealed that commonalities exist between the superintendent and legislator perceptions of how superintendents influence the development of educational policy. The tactics that the superintendent and legislator respondents both identified school leaders actually employing can be categorized in accordance with the three broad themes previously reported: superintendents interacting with legislators and their staff members,

superintendents participating as members of professional organizations, and superintendents enlisting local stakeholders.

Interacting with legislators and their staff members. There were several aspects of superintendent interactions with legislators and their staff members on which the participants shared common views. Both parties revealed that superintendents and legislators each play a role in selecting environments where interactions will occur between the school leaders and lawmakers. They cited locations including school district administrative offices and school campuses, legislators' offices in their districts and at the Capitol, and celebratory events in the school district such as graduation as formal environments where they interact with one another. In addition, the participants identified informal meetings at community organizations like Lion's and Rotary Clubs as places where they intermingle.

Both participant groups also reported that superintendents ensure they are available when needed as a source of information for legislators as another avenue of procuring influence in policy development. The importance of being available for legislators was said to be particularly necessary during the legislative session. Each side talked about late night phone calls that take place when legislators require input from their school leaders to make informed decisions on legislation under consideration.

Two additional strategies addressed by the participants as key to superintendents' abilities to influence policy development were serving on legislatively appointed sub-committees and providing testimony before the House Public Education Committee and Senate Education Committee. Superintendents and lawmakers explained that the information gained by legislators through these interactions allowed them to make better

decisions when considering legislation that impacts education. Both sides also expressed the opinion that superintendents who establish strong relationships with legislators are more often invited to provide lawmakers with information as members of sub-committees or by giving testimony.

Superintendents and Legislators also agreed that school leaders utilize various forms of communication with legislators and their staff members to affect policy development. They identified talking via cell phone as the most common and often most helpful type of interaction. Additionally, both sides detailed that superintendents communicate in person, via text message, letter, and fax. Each participant group also shared that superintendents who understand the timing of communication with legislators and its impact on the development of legislation are better able to exert influence on that process.

Both groups emphasized that establishing relationships with legislative staff members was another approach superintendents employ to effect policy development. They agreed that staff members are typically more accessible to superintendents and are often responsible for conveying their policy concerns from school leaders to the Representatives. The superintendents and legislators stressed that superintendents who build strong rapport with staff members are more likely to get their ideas presented to the legislators.

Participating as members of professional organizations. There are aspects of superintendent participation in professional organizations on which both respondent groups agree when comparing their perceptions of how superintendents influence educational policy development. However, there are also areas in which the two sides'

views do not align. Both parties discussed that superintendents join organizations that best represent their school districts' specific policy interests. Superintendents and legislators recognized TASA as the foremost organization involved in the policy development process on behalf of school leaders. Both sides also stated that superintendents who are active participants in their professional associations are better able to advocate for their districts on policy issues.

Enlisting local stakeholders. Although both participant groups agreed that superintendents enlist their local stakeholders as a tactic to influence policy development, the methods in which school leaders exert this power was not identified in the same way by the respondents. Both sides concurred that superintendents educate their local community on legislative candidates in a manner that can indirectly effect the creation of legislation. They also noted that superintendents have a unique knowledge base to provide their communities with factual information regarding potential legislators attempting to represent their school districts.

Further, the data from respondents indicated that they perceived school leaders influence policy development by facilitating interactions between legislators and the community. Superintendents and lawmakers mentioned public forum events organized by the school leaders that allowed for community members to discuss their legislative concerns with the Representatives. Both parties also discussed superintendents hosting legislators at school-wide events and allowing the lawmaker opportunities to address and interact with parents and staff members.

Differences Between Superintendent and Legislator Perceptions

There were many strategies that both groups of respondents agreed superintendents use to influence the development of educational policies. However, there were also several tactics that superintendents were perceived to employ that were mentioned by only one group of participants. These differences between superintendent and legislator perceptions will be reported according to the previously identified major themes that emerged from the findings of the first two research questions.

Interacting with legislators and their staff members. While the participants shared several common methods for interacting with legislators and their staff members to influence the development of educational policy, there were also tactics addressed by superintendents that were not mentioned by lawmakers. One of these strategies was effort on the part of the school leader to get to know legislators early in their candidacies. Superintendents explained that they introduce themselves to candidates, share information about their school districts, and attempt to understand the policy ideas of the candidate prior to their potential election. These school leaders said that meeting candidates at this time gives them an opportunity to be viewed by candidates as a potential, willing resource for information and can eventually result in superintendents having increased influence on the decisions of lawmakers.

Showing respect for legislators was another aspect of superintendent and legislator interactions that superintendents said they were mindful of when interacting with lawmakers. The school leaders agreed that they determine which educational issues they believe their legislators can be influenced to view differently. The superintendents said they spent their time and energy focusing on those subjects rather than fighting what

they considered to be a losing battle by debating topics on which there appeared no possibility of consensus.

The superintendents were also the only group to discuss how school leaders offer input during the development of legislation. They discussed how they approach legislators with ideas for new legislation during the interim and attempt to work cooperatively with the legislator and their staff to create bills for consideration in the next legislative session. The superintendents also explained that they keep an eye on the education bills that progress through the House and Senate during legislative sessions and provide input to their lawmakers about the potential impact of legislation as testimony is being provided and amendments are being considered.

The efforts that superintendents make to facilitate interactions between legislators is a final strategy that superintendents identified they use to influence policy development that was not noted by legislators. The school leaders said they most often work to facilitate communication between their Representatives and members of the House Public Education Committee and Senate Education Committee. Educating lawmakers as to the ramifications of proposed legislation for school districts represented by other legislators was one tactic identified by superintendents as helpful in facilitating interactions between their legislators and other lawmakers.

Participating as members of professional organizations. The superintendent participants were the only group to address that school leaders influence policy development through their involvement in TASA's mentorship program. This training allows experienced superintendents to share their knowledge regarding effective lobbying practices with superintendents who are new to the position. Similarly, legislators were

the only group to address the strategy superintendents in professional organizations utilize by presenting a unified voice to lawmakers regarding their policy concerns in order to exert greater influence during the development of educational legislation.

Enlisting local stakeholders. Only the superintendent respondents discussed how school leaders educate the local community on current and proposed legislation to influence policy development. They explained the power that a “grass roots” approach can have and their role in helping to encourage the involvement of the parents in their school districts. In addition, the superintendents were the only group to talk using the strategy of educating their school staff. Participants mentioned faculty meetings where they discuss factual information about legislative candidates prior to elections and other meetings in which they update their staff on legislation being considered, along with its potential effects on their school districts and how their staff can make their voice heard with lawmakers. Finally, the superintendent group spoke to their efforts to educate their School Board members. They described helping their Board members to grasp the importance of superintendents advocating on behalf of school district with their legislators.

Additional Findings

During the data analysis process, legislator perceptions surfaced in regard to actions the lawmakers believed superintendents should take to increase their level of influence in the development of educational policy. While these findings do not directly answer the research questions posed in this study, the information could be of value to individuals interested in tactics superintendents could employ to increase their level of

influence when working with legislators. Therefore, these additional findings were determined by the researcher to merit being reported.

Recognize the Need for Superintendent Input

According to legislators, superintendents who aspire to plan an important role in influencing educational policy development should recognize the need for superintendent input. Legislators stressed that they need accurate information in order to make informed policy decisions when developing legislation. They cast votes on an extremely broad array of issues in a short period of time. Legislator B shared that he and his colleagues require the help of school leaders when attempting to understand educational issues.

One of the challenges of being a legislator is that you are by nature a generalist....you cast 1000's of votes each session on issues that you have had little exposure to...and 99.9% of the time when you are engaged in a committee hearing or a debate on the floor of the house...the people who have stakeholdership in the issue...the people who do it all day every day know more about it than we who are making policy...That's the nature of the beast.

The need for lawmakers to be educated on public school matters was also addressed by Legislator C

Not many members of the legislature are...well this is going to sound bad...not many of the members in this building know much about public education...that's just the hard, cold truth of it...especially when you get into things like funding formulas and what you spend your money for and what you can't spend it for and things like that...very shallow bench of knowledge in the legislature about all that...and most of that is concentrated in the Article III people and Public Education people and people who served on those two groups in the past.

Enhance Rapport with Legislators

The legislators cited that superintendents wanting to influence the creation of state policy should enhance their level of rapport with lawmakers. Legislator C reported that it

is initially important to make sure that legislators simply know who you are. He pointed out that a superintendent's first meeting with a lawmaker does not have to be an elaborate interaction.

I think any time you get an opportunity to form a relationship with your state rep. it's wise to do so if you're a superintendent...I don't mean you've got to schmooze with them all the time but they certainly need to know who you are.

According to Legislator C, superintendents should also seek to get to know lawmakers outside traditional settings to strengthen their relationship. However, he noted this is more easily accomplished in some locations depending on the population of the community involved.

Getting to know them on an informal basis is important...That's easier in some places than in others...If you're in Houston, that's really difficult....Out in West Texas somewhere that's just a given....Pretty much everybody knows the superintendent...Pretty much everybody knows the State Rep. or Senator...So it's very different again depending on where you are in the state.

For superintendents who do not know their legislators, Legislator C advised the school leader utilize a School Board member to assist in initiating contact with a lawmaker.

Find a board member or two...In most communities there's going to be a board member or two that has a good relationship with the state Senator or State Rep...I'd ask them to go with me to a meeting to find out what that Senator or Rep. has in mind for their educational agenda...Tell them about your schools...Tell them about yourself...Try to start that relationship.

Legislator C identified an important aspect for superintendents to consider when educating stakeholders on legislative issues and encouraging them to contact their representatives. He recommended that superintendents inform those stakeholders of the importance of sharing their concerns with lawmakers in a respectful manner. "You need to be careful that they don't become adversarial with the legislators". He emphasized this

point and shared the effects of prior instances in which legislators felt unreasonably attacked by interest groups.

I know members that have marked off teachers' groups, or in more recent years, marked off retired teachers, because they couldn't possibly....They can't get the retired teachers that cost of living allowance they want...They know they can't get it...and they know that unless they get it the retired teachers are going to remain unhappy with them...and that's bad both directions.

According to Legislator C, on occasion, legislators will make a decision regarding an education policy with which the superintendent disagrees. He stressed the importance of the superintendent handling those scenarios in a professional manner that allows for rapport with the lawmaker to be preserved.

They'll have a Representative that doesn't vote the way they want them to on something...and they'll get really hostile with them...and they maybe had a good relationship, and they'll burn that relationship...bad move, that's just a really unfortunate move...because like me I've got Ch. 41's and Ch 42's...small and large like I said...So some of those votes are going to be good for one district, perhaps not for the other....and maybe next time it goes...It will be good for that one and not for the other....Any one vote should not define that relationship between the superintendent and their representative.

According to Legislator B, a significant benefit of forming strong relationships with legislators is the potential for superintendents to increase their opportunities to share their perspectives regarding issues that affect schools. He revealed that the political realities are that stakeholders who have access to decision-makers increase the likelihood of getting their ideas implemented.

There are interest holders on all sides of it and almost always all of them know more about the issue than we do so we are hard pressed to adjudicate their disputes when they know more about it than we do and it's really whichever one of them gets in to see you that wins the argument...because they're the ones who...because we don't know enough to rebut them...the process is meant to ensure that both sides of the issue get in and both sides get heard...but in truth political influence is such that generally speaking both sides aren't equally influential and therefore aren't equally able to have their voices heard.

Be Aware of the Intent of Legislative Sub-Committees

Legislator C explained that superintendents should be aware of the intent of legislative sub-committees that are formed. He shared that some legislative sub-committees are created with no true desire on the part of the architects of the sub-committee for potential recommendations of the sub-committee to be actualized. Rather, these groups are commissioned to give the public the appearance that legislators are seriously considering a group's concerns. "A lot of select committees of that nature are intended to be a pressure relief valve more than they are to find policies to tell you the truth". He described a particular sub-committee in which those "in the know" were aware that no real action would be taken. However, even in this scenario, he noted the potential benefits to the superintendents who were invited to serve on that sub-committee. "While they might not have had much influence on that particular committee result, it did give them a boost in their visibility within the education part of the mechanism here and has them now in fairly significant policy roles".

Understand Which Legislators' Opinions are Respected

According to lawmakers, superintendents who desire to affect the development of educational policies should understand which legislators' opinions are respected. The ability of school leaders to influence communication between legislators was recognized by the legislator respondents as a valuable. This was said to be especially important because legislators tend to have specialized areas of knowledge and interest and are often aware of other lawmakers' areas of expertise. Legislators expressed that they look to their colleagues when making policy decisions. Participant A provided insight into the

knowledge gap that lawmakers regularly face and illustrated how they depend on their colleagues in making policy decisions.

We deal with so many different subjects...6000 bills filed...50 different subjects...that it would be impossible for anyone to know everything there is to know about all the subjects...So as you go through the process of getting experience as a legislator...you get to know who knows what about a particular thing and can they be trusted in what they are saying.

Legislator C explained that it is vital for superintendents to know who the “go to” people are in the legislature on educational issues. “Not many of the members in this building know much about public education...that’s just the hard, cold truth of it”. Based on this viewpoint, he claimed that superintendents need to be able to determine which legislators are respected for their knowledge in the area of public education and to establish a rapport with them.

You know there’s only 150 of us in the House and only 31 in the Senate....so you learn pretty quick who knows which subject area...and whose judgment you trust in that subject area and you tend to vote with those people...So forming an alliance between your district and someone who is known and trusted in school matters is important.

He also noted that determining which lawmakers are respected for their knowledge in particular policy areas is easier said than done. “Finding that sort of relationship is hard because it’s not as visible to the outside world as it is to the membership itself”.

Know the Chief of Staff and Education Staff Members

Legislators indicated that school leaders should know the Chief of Staff and other staff members involved with education legislation. According to two of the legislator participants, the Chief of Staff has the power to determine who gets access to the lawmaker because this staff member is responsible for maintaining the legislator’s calendar. Legislator C described the role of his Chief of Staff and the fact that many

people do not realize the power the Chief holds. “I think most boards and most superintendents, and most people in general, underestimate the influence of the staff...the Chief of Staff is basically a gatekeeper...she determines who is going to get to talk to me”.

Lawmakers reported that legislators usually have a specific staff member assigned to oversee legislation dealing with education. However, Legislator A shared that these staff members do not always have a strong background in the area of public education.

Most people don’t have the advantage of having a person on their staff who knows education... but that doesn’t mean that you can’t be influential...but it does mean that the superintendent has a greater responsibility to educate the legislators about what is going on in their districts...and most legislators in Texas have several districts that they deal with...not just one.

Legislator respondents shared that when a superintendent wants to discuss education policy, it is often the education staff member, rather than the legislator, whom the superintendent will contact to discuss their concerns. Educating staff members on issues concerning the superintendent in a way that allows the staffer to easily convey the message to the legislator at a later time is crucial according to Legislator A. “I’m hands on in a lot of ways but I rely very heavily on the research that’s done by my staff when it comes to the various issues”. Further, Legislator C explained that while some legislators do not have the good fortune of working with a staff member with a strong public education background, other legislators employ former school leaders as staffers. In these cases, the legislator may lean very heavily on the recommendations of this staff member. He highlighted the importance of superintendents engaging heavily with the staff member overseeing education issues.

Daniel for example in my office....I keep him specifically for public education issues...If he sees an opportunity for a bill....either to oppose a bill...get on a

bill...draft a bill...He will bring that idea to me and say “We need to think about doing this.”...and it’s probably a lot more likely that somebody is going to get a big hunk of time with him...and get a chance to convince him of their position than they are with me...not to mention the fact that he knows the subject far better than I do because of his background.

Contribute Throughout the Development of Legislation

Legislator B provided his opinions on tactics superintendents should use to contribute to the development of legislation. He represents an area that includes school districts of various sizes and explained that the size of a school district affects how a superintendent pursues attempts to develop legislation. According to the lawmaker, larger districts employ attorneys who assist the superintendent in drafting language for a bill, whereas superintendents from smaller districts do not have that luxury. He also offered this example of how a superintendent of a larger district might conceivably attempt to generate new legislation.

If I were a superintendent and I had a specific change in statute that I sought, I would ask my general counsel...depending on the size of my school district...I would ask my general counsel’s office to tell me how they want the statute to read...then I would go to my legislator and if my legislator is supportive, I would ask that legislator to run my general counsel’s language through the legislative counsel process...because they will format it differently...and probably more correctly than your general counsel...but the substantive language...the language that the people who have to comply with it every day in the field...that’s probably going to be better drafted by a school district lawyer than by our legislative counsel.

One seemingly important aspect of the policy development process was only addressed by Legislator B. He discussed the need to bring together all affected stakeholder groups to hash out the details of new legislation early in the crafting of policy to avoid putting lawmakers in the position of trying to determine which interest group is making the best argument later in the process.

What's best is if the interest groups can get together themselves and instead of having a war for who has the most legislators in their pocket...you know try to hash out where they can find common ground....what I find amazing is how bad they are a doing that.

Strengthen the Unity of Their Voice

According to legislators, superintendents should strengthen the unity of their voice when advocating with lawmakers if they want to influence policy development. With more than 1000 schools represented by an organization the size of TASA, the participants recognized that putting forth a common message was a serious challenge. However, they also emphasized that dissention within the membership seriously decreased the effectiveness of lobby efforts. Legislator B spoke to this concern.

Superintendents are not monolithic....They don't all agree with each other on everything and when they don't it dilutes their impact...We all have confirmation bias...We all want to hear what we want to hear...The only way for superintendents to make us think something different than we are predisposed to believe is if they are sort of united.

The challenge of finding a common accord among a large contingency of school districts as TASA must do was mentioned by Legislator B. He also addressed the importance of superintendents in an association expressing the same sentiments when communicating with lawmakers on policy issues.

What we see is what TASA brings to us.....usually they...I think in most cases message some sort of cohesive opinion as best they can before they bring it to us....Superintendents should be very cautious about branching off from their association...If you can stay with the association's position at all, you ought to stay with them because once you start bringing mixed messages to the legislature it usually goes downhill.

Offer Solutions

Lawmakers said that superintendents who aspire to influence policy development should shift their strategy from complaining about current policies to offering solutions to improve current legislation. Participants cited the need for associations to provide legislators with realistic options to consider as solutions to the problems the organizations identify within the current system. Purely complaining about the current state of affairs was shared by the legislators as unproductive. Legislator A described her frustration with some her previous experiences.

I think it's important when superintendents work together in an organization that they come up with suggestions and solutions...The one thing that they have been unsuccessful at doing is if anyone just takes the strategy that we are going to complain or we don't like this...that's not going to get anywhere because that's just not productive.

Legislator C expressed similar concerns, stressing the value of the school leader coming to him with suggestions for improvements to the current education code rather than merely complaining about an issue.

Giving me suggestions is important...Very often I catch more complaints than suggestions which is very frustrating...I'd say if you can move in your thought process from "This just isn't working...This is a problem for my school"...to like "If we would change this part of the code"...remember everything has to be in a bill that changes that education code... Move from thinking about the problems to trying to identify a change to code and say "Here's a change in code that could be done and help this problem"...So moving from just problem identification to suggestions for solutions would go a long way.

Realize Potential Consequences of Supporting Candidates

According to legislators, school leaders who wish to affect policy creation should realize the potential consequences of supporting candidates in legislative elections. They mentioned the possibility of superintendents damaging their relationships with School

Board members who back another candidate. Legislator B described this concern. “It’s still risky to do it because you’ve got elected Board members who aren’t all going to agree with you...so you’re risking losing some of the support of your Board when you do it”. Creating a rift with Board members is not the only potential consequence identified by legislators when a superintendent is viewed as overtly supportive of a particular candidate. According to Legislator B, superintendents who are perceived as politically active run the risk of damaging their chances to provide input during the policy development process. “If you are viewed as really political in a way that is at cross purposes with the controlling majorities around here, then you are less likely to be included in the policy crafting process”. Legislator C provided similar feedback. He asserted that when candidates are elected and believe that superintendents or other parties associated with public schools were fervently opposing their candidacies, it can be harmful to the causes that these school leaders and groups are attempting to champion. He talked about his knowledge of lawmakers whose decision making has been affected by their perception that particular interest groups involved with public education opposed their election.

I know of members here who would have been more favorably inclined toward public school issues had they not felt that the superintendent or the teachers’ group or somebody within the school system opposed them in their candidacy.... Say you oppose somebody and they win, then you’ve got a bit of a problem on your hands...So superintendents need to be very careful in that regard.

On the other hand, Legislator B revealed that when candidates feel supported by an interest group and get elected, positive things can occur in terms of the future opportunities for that interest group to impact the development of public policy.

You always give up something if you bet on a losing candidate...you give up a lot in your ability to craft public policy after the election...but if you bet on a winning candidate, you gain a lot...so it's high risk/high reward and the safe play is to straddle both sides of the aisle and then do your best to influence them once they get here.

Despite the concerns shared by other participants, Legislator B explained his belief that superintendents should ultimately be involved in educating stakeholders about legislative candidates.

I believe that this building and the people in it should be held accountable for the consequences of what we do and parents tend to look to you to know whether we are serving the schools well or poorly...If we muzzle the superintendents then it becomes much harder for the parents to have access to get information they need and trust about their legislators.

Empower the Local Community

In addition to providing stakeholders with information on legislative candidates, lawmakers also noted that superintendents should educate the local community on legislation being considered by lawmakers. By informing the community, Legislator A explained that superintendents can indirectly impact legislation. "It's not a matter of direct influence. It's a matter of telling your story, and in telling your story you are going to influence the legislator". She also expressed her opinion that improvements can be made on the part of superintendents in getting their story out to the public. "Superintendent have got to get with the program on everything, whether they like it or not. Twittering, weekly electronic newsletter type things, I think that's the way to influence your community today".

According to Legislator B, educating the local community allows a common message to be shared by multiple constituent groups in a legislator's district. He explained that parents who voice concerns can carry more weight than issues brought up

by a superintendent because lawmakers may perceive the parents concerns as more genuine. “The more you can empower your parents to advocate for their kids’ education, the less this is about institutional interests and the more it’s about the real purpose of public education”. He cited the power of a school district’s parents as particularly important when a legislator is personally less interested in the issue of public education.

If I were a member who was mostly interested in other things and I didn’t serve on the (House Public Education) committee...and my superintendent is squawking about funding...and what I really want to do is get my superintendent to stop squawking....right...That’s really what I want to do...so how do I do it if the squawking just won’t stop...the best outcome for the superintendent is to have that legislator who isn’t otherwise engaged on the issue, to feel that the political pressure to engage can’t be ignored...and that’s not going to come just from the superintendent, that’s got to come from parents.

Network with School Board Members

Networking with School Board members was reported by the legislators as a strategy that superintendents should utilize to influence policy development. There was agreement among the participants that it was ideal for superintendents and School Board members to reach consensus on the agenda they wanted to support together and advocate for those positions on behalf of the school district. Legislator A described her viewpoint on how this is done.

I think that it’s probably fair to say that superintendents...at least some would have some sort of legislative briefing meetings in which they could determine their legislative agenda as a body...and at the very least, agree on the things they agree on and drop the things they disagree on....and let their legislators know.

The legislators revealed that the School Board members often carry more clout than superintendents when advocating with lawmakers. Legislator A recommended that the superintendent and Board come to consensus on their agenda and for a Board member to then take the lead in lobbying their position.

For the superintendent and Board as a team of eight to agree on what they agree on... and then for the Board president or someone on the Board to take the lead on communicating that to the legislators is a very good strategy.

Conversely, rather than having a Board member take the lead, Legislator C encouraged a team approach to engaging with legislators to lobby on behalf of the school district. He saw this as an extremely strong strategy to which legislators should give significant weight when considering their policy decisions because of the potential effects to the future candidacy of the lawmaker.

I'd try to come with the superintendent and the Board president togetherIf you have a team...say this is the superintendent, this is the board president...maybe a couple board members...and they approach you as a group...and you know that the superintendent is speaking for the political will of the community...That's potent...You cross that at your own peril.

Legislator A also acknowledged the power that School Board members can potentially wield across state and local elections. "When you think about 7000 plus School Board members in the state, it's the largest political body in the state...so clearly they can have a large influence locally".

There were other reasons cited for perceiving School Board member advocacy as more substantial than that of the superintendent. Legislator A mentioned that superintendents, as employees of the school district, are more prone to being biased in their positions on public school policy than independently elected school board members. Additionally, Legislator C noted that the longevity of Board Members is often greater than the tenure of superintendents in a local community. He commented that he would likely be working with the Board members for a much longer time than any individual superintendent.

I think the Board members because they are elected and have had to run a race and have a larger constituency...plus they'll be there for a long time...

Superintendent tenures are pretty short as you know....They tend to come and go...The Board members are probably going to be there the rest of their life as an elected official...When that president of the School Board calls and says “Hey, we need to talk about this”....by golly, we’re going to talk about that.

A final aspect was identified by the legislators as worthy of consideration by superintendents when attempting to influence interactions between School Board members and lawmakers. They mentioned that while School Board positions are not offices formally associated with a particular political party, Board members usually are engaged in party politics and have connections to elected officials inside that party. Therefore, participants explained that superintendents should be savvy regarding the political ties of their Board members and utilize their connections appropriately. Legislator B emphasized this point, saying “Your trustees can be your best lobbyists. If they’re a fairly diverse political group, use them strategically based on what their individual political connections are”.

Summary

Chapter four explored the responses to three research questions and reported additional findings not directly addressed in the research questions. Utilizing the data obtained from the superintendent and legislator participants, themes became apparent and provided answers to the identified research questions. The feedback provided by the participants in this study allowed for the determination of three broad themes related to the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence legislators in the development of educational policy. The three themes that emerged from the reported participants’ perceptions were superintendents interacting with legislators and their staff members, superintendents participating as members of professional organizations, and

superintendents enlisting local stakeholders, each in an effort to influence the development of educational policies. The findings reported in Chapter four will be further discussed in Chapter five, along with the implications of these findings for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Summary of Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

Chapter four presented the findings obtained through interviews with the participating superintendents and legislators. Chapter five starts by reviewing the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methodology employed in determining answers to the research questions. An analysis of the research findings is included, along with identification of implications for future practice. Finally, a presentation of recommendations for future research concludes this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to identify superintendent and legislator perceptions regarding strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. This research sought to reveal the views of superintendents and legislators regarding the tactics superintendents employ, such as supporting legislative candidates and engaging as active members of professional organizations, in an attempt to influence the policy agenda favored by the superintendent. The perceptions gathered from superintendents and lawmakers were compared to determine where their views were aligned and identify how their perceptions differed.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the research process:

1. How do Texas superintendents perceive they influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?
2. How do Texas legislators perceive Texas superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

3. What commonalities and differences exist between the perceptions of Texas superintendents and legislators in regard to how superintendents influence state legislators in the development of educational policies?

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was utilized to describe the perceptions of superintendents and legislators. This investigation employed grounded theory to construct a framework to describe the strategies superintendents use when influencing the development of educational policies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Participants included three Texas superintendents and three Texas legislators. Data was gathered through one-on-one interviews with participants. The qualitative data was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding methods (Patton, 2002).

Significant Findings

Findings within the research questions are interrelated and overlapping. Three major themes were identified from the perceptions of superintendents and legislators as to how superintendents influence the development of educational policies. The first theme was found to be that superintendents influence educational policy development by interacting with legislators and their staff members. The second theme was determined to be that school leaders influence educational policy development by participating as members of professional organizations. The third major theme discovered in this research was that superintendents enlist local stakeholders in order to affect policy development.

Interacting with Legislators and Their Staff Members

Within the first identified theme, superintendents interacting with legislators and their staff members, there were several subthemes. It was found that superintendents select environments where interactions occur with legislators when influencing the development of educational policies. Also, school leaders build rapport with legislators by getting to know legislators early, showing respect for legislators, and being available to legislators. Superintendents also establish relationships with legislative staff members to affect policy change. Findings revealed that superintendents provide legislators with information by serving on legislative sub-committees and by testifying before lawmakers. In addition, school leaders utilize a variety of communication methods to influence legislators' decisions. Further, superintendents exhibit an understanding of the timing of communication that is necessary to impact the development of educational policies, and they offer input throughout the process of creating new legislation. Finally, school leaders facilitate interactions between legislators to promote educational initiatives they favor.

Participating as Members of Professional Organizations

The second major theme identified as a tactic by which superintendents influence the development of educational policies is through their participation as members of professional organizations. A few subthemes emerged from the data describing the involvement of superintendents as constituents in associations. Superintendents who impact legislator decisions are active participants in the leadership of professional organizations. They elect to participate as members of organizations that best represent

the needs of their school districts. School leaders take on the role of mentor to assist superintendent colleagues in the growth of their advocacy skills. Finally, superintendents present a unified stance on educational issues as a part of their associations.

Enlisting Local Stakeholders

Enlisting local stakeholders is the third major theme found in the data as a strategy employed by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. Within this theme, there are several subthemes that more directly identify the actions taken by superintendents. School leaders educate their local community on legislative candidates as well as current and proposed legislation. They also educate their school district staffs and School Board members. Finally, superintendents were found to facilitate interactions between legislators and the local community.

Major Strategy Utilized By Superintendents

Following grounded theory guidelines, the researcher conducted further analysis of the major themes identified in this study in an effort to distinguish one overarching common thread. From this deeper examination, the strategy of superintendents building and fostering relationships to influence the development of educational policies emerged. This determination supports the previous findings of Allen (1985), who reported that the most effective strategy used by superintendents attempting to influence the political process was to establish long-term relationships with legislators. This finding also supports a previous study conducted by Chojnacki (1992) who reported that the

effectiveness of superintendent lobbying strategies are the direct result of personal relationships with legislators.

To influence the development of educational policies, superintendents must exhibit the ability to build relationships with legislators and their staff members. They must also create relationships with colleagues in professional organizations and the leaders of those associations. In addition, superintendents establish relationships with their local stakeholders to increase their ability to influence legislative policy development. While these relationships mentioned are direct relationships, superintendents are also found to serve as facilitators of relationships. As members of professional organizations, superintendents attempt to impact educational policy development by fostering relationships between their superintendent colleagues and legislators. Similarly, superintendents foster relationships between their local stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and School Board members, with their State Representatives and Senators.

Building relationships with legislators and their staff members. The school district leaders' propensity to influence the development of educational policy is enhanced when relationships are built with legislators and their staff members. Through their relationships with legislators and staff members, superintendents increase the likelihood of being invited to contribute during the policy making process as a member of special legislative sub-committees. They also increase their likelihood of being invited to testify before the House Public Education Committee and Senate Education Committee.

Previous studies by Rosenthal and Furhman (1981) and Andero (2000) asserted that legislators' staff members were typically responsible for gathering information,

analyzing data, keeping lawmakers abreast of the issues, and controlling the information that ultimately gets to legislators from those who would wish to influence their decisions. The findings of this study concur with these researchers' previous claims. School leaders with strong ties to legislators and staff members are more likely to be contacted with questions regarding policy issues and with requests for data. These interactions increase the exposure of the needs of the superintendent's school district to policy makers. Furthermore, the strength of these relationships allows superintendents more leeway to question lawmakers and staff members when they contact superintendents requesting data. This rapport provides the superintendent the chance to clarify the purpose of the data requested without offending the staff member or lawmaker. The findings of this study suggest lawmakers want information that is timely in relation to their timetable for making policy decisions. This is in contrast to previous determinations of Nelson (1994) who reported that lawmakers wanted information distributed evenly throughout the legislative session and throughout the entire year.

Superintendents need to understand the interrelationships of lawmakers within the Capitol. This knowledge provides them a greater opportunity to identify which legislators are considered resident experts on education issues. Superintendents can then be strategic in developing relationships with these "expert" legislators and their staff members, which can ultimately result in greater superintendent influence in the policy development process. Moreover, school district leaders with strong ties to lawmakers are more likely to gain access to these decision makers at critical times because the superintendent with a relationship is more likely to have multiple methods of contacting the legislator.

Lingenfelter (1985) previously studied the effectiveness of various forms of communication between legislators and superintendents and reported that face to face contact was significantly more influential than any other method of communication. However, this study found that lawmakers often prefer phone communication because it is perceived as more timely and convenient. In addition, Chojnacki (1992) found that superintendents were most effective when presenting information to legislators in person, by phone, or by letter. However, participants in this study asserted that letters from superintendents were rarely viewed as an influential form of communication.

When staff members are aware of the rapport between the superintendent and legislator, they are more likely to grant the superintendent access to engage with the Representative or Senator. With greater access to legislators, superintendents with strong relationships have more chances to be actively engaged with lawmakers during the policy development process. These superintendents are also more likely to be contacted by legislators and their staff as education legislation is being drafted and moving through the committee process, thus giving superintendents with rapport more opportunity to provide feedback on how policies will affect their particular school district. Additionally, when superintendents are looking for legislators to carry bills they believe to be of merit, those with stronger relationships with lawmakers have a better probability of locating a willing legislator.

Building and fostering relationships in professional organizations. A recurring theme in the data regarding superintendents' involvement in their professional organizations was the need for the development and sustainment of a unified message. Participants noted the importance of organizations finding common ground among their

membership when attempting to influence lawmakers. These results echoed previous findings of Marinelli (1996) who reported that associations could command greater attention from legislators if they would pool their resources and unify their voices.

McClellan, Ivory, and Dominguez (2008) previously detailed the importance of superintendents collaborating with their colleagues in order to be effective leaders. The finding of this study also suggest superintendents need to build relationships with superintendent colleagues, as well as leaders of professional organizations such as TASA, to increase their potential ability to influence the development of educational policy. When superintendents develop rapport in their professional organizations, they are more likely to be selected to participate as active members of leadership committees within the association. Increased participation in leadership roles of state-wide organizations by superintendents raises the visibility of their school district's needs by providing an avenue for the school district leader to have a voice in the policy development process to a larger extent than colleagues not actively engaged in their professional associations.

In addition to impacting the development of educational policy through building relationships with superintendent colleagues and the leadership of professional organizations, superintendents can also impact policy by fostering relationships between superintendent colleagues and legislators. Superintendents can foster these relationships by helping to identify which legislators in the Capitol are considered the experts on given educational issues and supporting the superintendents working within that Representative or Senator's local district to approach these legislators and build relationships between that superintendent and legislator. The assisting superintendent can also mentor the "in-district" superintendent regarding strategies to engage that local superintendent's local

stakeholders to empower them to be effective advocates for legislation viewed as positive for public schools by the mentoring superintendent.

Multiple participants expressed the powerful influence that can be exerted upon legislators when organizations combine their efforts to impact policy development. Comments were made by superintendents and legislators related to the potentially potent effects on policy making that a unification of interests between TASA and the organizations representing School Board members, the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), could have on lawmakers' decisions. This finding corroborates prior contentions by Marinelli (1996) and Brown (1989) that unifying stakeholder groups can significantly impact the positions of legislators on educational issues.

Building and fostering relationships with local stakeholders. The third area in which superintendents must build and foster strong relationships in order to influence policy development is with their local stakeholders. Superintendents who build relationships with parents, the local business community, school staff, and School Board members by educating them on the accomplishments and challenges of their school district ensure a better informed group of stakeholders is created. By focusing effort and attention on creating rapport with local stakeholders, a relationship in which the superintendent is allowed to provide constructive instructions to stakeholders regarding how they should conduct themselves when engaging with legislators is more likely to be accepted and followed. Both participant groups stressed the importance of avoiding hostile exchanges between individuals advocating on behalf of schools with legislators. This finding agrees with prior results from Chojnacki (1992) which noted that

stakeholders advocating on behalf of schools were more successful when they avoided utilizing tactics meant to embarrass legislators.

A more knowledgeable local community that understands the appropriate manner in which to engage legislators can then be supported by fostering the development of relationships between lawmakers and the local community that, thanks to its engaged superintendent, can more effectively express the true needs of their school district in regard to policy development. This is meaningful information because both superintendent and legislator participants highlighted the power that engaged parents and community members have to impact how legislators view issues. Similarly, Wirt and Christovich (1989) had previously alleged that public authorities are responsive to the policy demands of their constituents. Brown (1989) had also discovered that constituents wield more influence on the decision-making of state legislators than any other group. Rosenthal (1998) expanded upon this claim, explaining that ordinary citizens had found an increase in their ability to influence policy decisions as the expansion of media created a more connected American society. Technological abilities have evolved significantly since Rosenthal's work, and it could be easily argued that the increase in social media has made today's lawmakers even more responsive to efforts of their constituents to influence them.

Based on the feedback of the participating legislators, the School Board members' relationships with legislators is a particular area in which superintendents should focus. First, superintendents can build a strong relationship with the Board members by educating them on the public policy issues impacting their school district. The superintendent can then foster a relationship between the Board members and legislators

by creating opportunities for the two parties to interact. This point was previously made by Pustka (2012) who explained the need for superintendents to increase their utilization of School Board members as advocates directly to the legislators. She stressed the significance that legislators place upon the views of Board members because they are also elected officials forced to answer to constituents. This was a point echoed by each of the legislators interviewed in this study.

Similarly, superintendents should build relationships with their teaching staffs by meeting with them regularly and providing information on legislative candidates and policy issues. Because parents may trust their teachers more than the superintendent and other administrators, by creating a better informed faculty, a superintendent can indirectly influence communication regarding policy development that can eventually spread from the teacher to legislators or from the teacher to parents, who may ultimately contact lawmakers to express the concerns initiated by the superintendent.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 5.1 illustrates an emerging theoretical framework constructed by the researcher from the data obtained in this study. This framework depicts the direct relationships superintendents build with legislators and their staff members, with superintendent colleagues and leaders of professional organizations, and with local stakeholders. The framework also shows the relationships that superintendents foster between legislators and members of professional organizations and between legislators and local stakeholders. In addition, the framework identifies the strategies employed by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies. This framework

may serve to guide future studies for more in-depth understandings of the relationships between superintendents and legislators and their staff members, superintendents and members of professional organizations, and superintendents and local stakeholders.

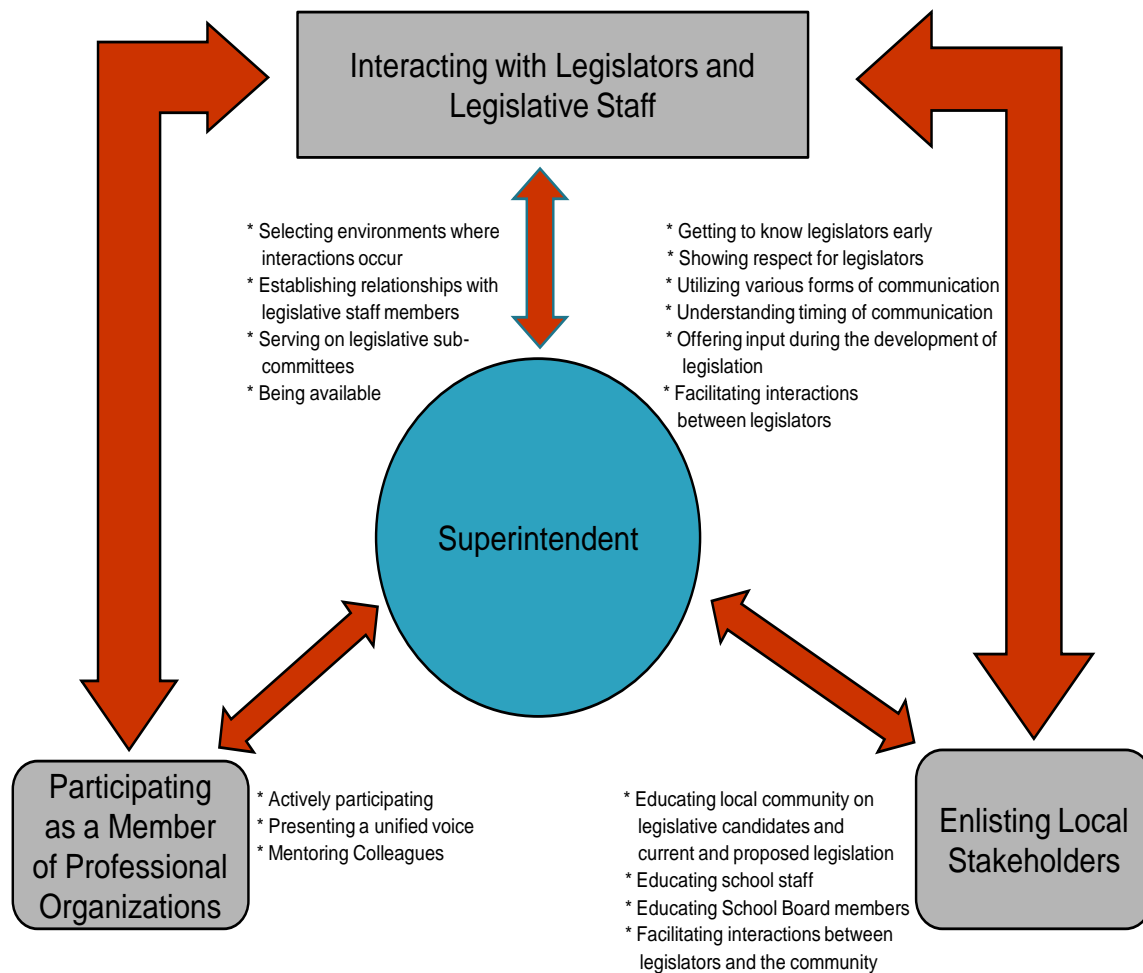


Figure 5.1 Theoretical Diagram: Strategies Utilized by Superintendents to Influence the Development of Educational Policies

Implications for Practice

In a time when the Texas legislature is heavily involved with the creation of policies that significantly impact the operation of local school districts, there are many implications associated with this research. First, future superintendents must receive the

necessary training during enrollment in superintendent certification programs to effectively prepare them to be active participants in the educational policy development process at the state level. Further, to support the development of superintendents' skills in advocating for the creation of educational policies, TASA, as the preeminent association for school administrators in Texas, must enhance its role in training superintendents to be influential change agents in the policy environment that exists within the Capitol. Participants expressed the value of the current TASA mentorship program, but they also noted that the number of superintendents actively engaged with legislators remains woefully low in their estimation. Included in this training must be opportunities to prepare superintendents to be effective members of legislative sub-committees and effective providers of testimony before the House Public Education Committee and Senate Education Committee.

Another implication arising from this study is the need for superintendents to more effectively enlist their Board members as advocates for the school district. The superintendents in this study noted that many of their Board members were not comfortable engaging in this role, yet each legislator stressed the power of the opinions submitted to them regarding educational policy by their local School Board members. It is incumbent upon superintendents to educate their School Board members, not only about legislative candidates and proposed policy, but also about the inferred power that Board members wield with legislators as fellow elected officials. In addition to helping the Board to realize their power with lawmakers, superintendents must also educate their School Boards regarding the importance of the superintendent engaging as a key contributor in the state educational policy development process. Board members must be

given the opportunity to understand the importance of their superintendent spending valuable time outside the local school district and the potential negative implications for their district should lawmakers not hear the concerns of their district from the school leader.

An additional implication derived from this study is the need for superintendents to expand the realm of their relationships with legislators outside merely their local district to include, at a minimum, those legislators serving on the House Public Education and Senate Education Committees. Superintendents must find an avenue to get their voices heard regarding the concerns of their school districts by the people in the best positions to actually address those concerns, the membership of education committees.

A final implication relates to the need for superintendents to create a network of active local stakeholders including teachers, parents, local business, and School Board members. Opportunities for influential stakeholders in the local community to be educated on the current state of the school district and the implications of lawmaker decisions are integral to holding legislators accountable for their decisions and for creating conditions for the effective advocacy of the school district's needs. When educating stakeholders, they must not only be taught about legislative agendas and current policy concerns. In addition, they must be informed on how to effectively navigate and operate within the legislative policy environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are few studies that have examined the strategies utilized by superintendents when attempting to influence the development of educational policies.

This is the only study the researcher is aware of that has used a qualitative approach to investigate the perceptions of both superintendents and legislators. Only three Texas superintendents and three Texas legislators were purposely selected to participate in this research. The major focus was on strategies actually used by superintendents to influence policy development, and therefore highlight, significant contributions to the research literature regarding the political role of the superintendent. The researcher notes that the superintendent strategies found in this study that influence the development of educational policies were general in nature and may or may not have applicability in all settings.

Researchers could build upon this study by conducting investigations that include other superintendents and stakeholders. For instance, future studies may include perceptions of: (a) Chiefs of Staff and other staff members employed specifically for oversight of educational policy to gain their perspectives on the strategies utilized by superintendents to influence the development of educational policy, (b) legislators without strong track records in the area of public education to compare their perceptions with those legislators involved in this study who had histories of high involvement with issues surrounding public education, (c) multiple superintendents working in small school districts, mid-size school districts, and large school districts to provide a richer compilation of data from which to compare and contrast the strategies utilized by superintendents of school districts with varying enrollments when attempting to influence the development of educational policy, (d) multiple superintendents within a Representative or Senator's district along with that specific legislator to compare and contrast the legislator's perceptions of the strategies employed by the superintendents in

attempting to influence the development of educational policies, (e) School Board members to determine their views of the strategies employed by their superintendent to influence the development of educational policy, and (f) key local stakeholders considered to have a sphere of influence in their communities to ascertain their perceptions of the tactics used by their superintendents to influence policy development.

Appendices

Appendix A - Letter to Legislators Requesting Participation in Study

Appendix B - Letter to Superintendents Requesting Participation in Study

Appendix C - Superintendent Interview Protocol

Appendix D - Legislator Interview Protocol

Appendix A

Letter to Legislators Requesting Participation in Study

University of Texas at Austin
College of Education
Department of Educational Administration

October 21, 2012

Dear Texas Legislator,

As a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin, I am currently conducting research on strategies utilized by superintendents to influence legislators in the development of educational policy. As a respected Texas legislator with knowledge and experience in the development of educational policy, you have been identified to be included in this research project. Therefore, this is to respectfully request your consent to participate in the study.

Our state legislature has become increasingly involved in developing educational policies that impact school districts in a significant manner. Reductions in per pupil spending and increased rigor of standardized testing are two relevant examples of legislative decisions that school districts and the superintendents that lead them are currently attempting to manage. Given the considerable impact that legislative decisions have on the work of the superintendent and the operation of public school districts in Texas, it is imperative that more research be conducted to understand how superintendents influence educational policy development at the state level.

My research will involve one-on-one interviews with Texas public school superintendents and state legislators regarding their perceptions of strategies that superintendents use to influence legislators in the development of educational policy. Your perceptions would be reported along with those of fellow legislators and Texas superintendents. All participants in this study will have the choice to remain anonymous. Results of the study will be shared with all interested participants and will be reported as part of my doctoral treatise.

Thank you for considering participating in this study. I will attempt to contact you by phone in the coming week to provide you with more information about this study and answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to call me at 512-558-1840 (cell) or email me at gbonewald@wimberley.txed.net at any time.

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Greg Bonewald
Doctoral Candidate
University of Texas at Austin

Appendix B

Letter to Superintendents Requesting Participation in Study

University of Texas at Austin
College of Education
Department of Educational Administration

October 21, 2012

Dear Superintendent,

As a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin, I am currently conducting research on strategies utilized by superintendents to influence legislators in the development of educational policy. As a respected Texas superintendent with knowledge of the political realm of the superintendency, you have been identified to be included in this research project. Therefore, this is to respectfully request your consent to participate in the study.

Our state legislature has become increasingly involved in developing educational policies that impact school districts in a significant manner. Reductions in per pupil spending and increased rigor of standardized testing are two relevant examples of legislative decisions that school districts and the superintendents that lead them are currently attempting to manage. Given the considerable impact that legislative decisions have on the work of the superintendent and the operation of public school districts in Texas, it is imperative that more research be conducted to understand how superintendents influence educational policy development at the state level.

My research will involve one-on-one interviews with Texas public school superintendents and state legislators regarding their perceptions of strategies that superintendents use to influence legislators in the development of educational policy. Your perceptions would be reported along with those of fellow superintendents and Texas legislators. All participants in this study will have the choice to remain anonymous. Results of the study will be shared with all interested participants and will be reported as part of my doctoral treatise.

Thank you for considering participating in this study. I will attempt to contact you by phone in the coming week to provide you with more information about this study and answer any questions that you may have. Please feel free to call me at 512-558-1840 (cell) or email me at gbonewald@wimberley.txed.net at any time.

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Greg Bonewald
Doctoral Candidate
University of Texas at Austin

Appendix C

Superintendent Interview Protocol

- 1.) Tell me about yourself.
- 2.) Describe your professional career in education from completion of your undergraduate degree to present.
- 3.) How many years have you served as a superintendent?
- 4.) In how many school districts have you served as superintendent?
- 5.) How do superintendents serving on legislative committees influence the development of educational policies?
- 6.) How do superintendents support legislative candidates for office who favor educational policies in line with the view of the superintendent?
- 7.) In what environments do superintendents interact with legislators to influence the development of educational policies?
- 8.) In what ways do superintendents facilitate interactions between legislators and their school district community members in an effort to influence the development of educational policies?
- 9.) How do superintendents provide legislators with data in an effort to influence the development of educational policy?
- 10.) How do superintendents influence communication between state representatives of their school districts and legislators on the education committees of the house or senate?
- 11.) How do superintendents work with superintendent colleagues to influence the development of educational policies?

- 12.) How do superintendents empower local community members in an attempt to influence the development of educational policies?
- 13.) How are the strategies used by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies affected by the timing of legislative sessions?
- 14.) How do superintendents work with the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) to influence the development of educational policies?
- 15.) How do superintendents work with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to influence the development of educational policies?
- 16.) How do superintendents work with the Education Service Centers (ESC's) to influence the development of educational policies?
- 17.) How do superintendents work with their local school board members to influence the development of educational policies?
- 18.) How are superintendents involved in the drafting of new legislation in order to influence the development of educational policies?
- 19.) What methods of communication do superintendents use when contacting legislators when trying to influence the development of educational policies?
- 20.) How are superintendents involved during the various stages of the policy development process?
- 21.) What do superintendents do during the various stages of policy development in order to influence the process?

Appendix D

Legislator Interview Protocol

- 1.) Tell me about yourself.
- 2.) Describe your career in politics.
- 3.) What factors led you to become a legislator?
- 4.) How many years have you served as a legislator?
- 5.) How do superintendents serving on legislative committees influence the development of educational policies?
- 6.) How do superintendents support legislative candidates for office who favor educational policies in line with the view of the superintendent?
- 7.) In what environments do superintendents interact with legislators to influence the development of educational policies?
- 8.) In what ways do superintendents facilitate interactions between legislators and their school district community members in an effort to influence the development of educational policies?
- 9.) How do superintendents provide legislators with data in an effort to influence the development of educational policy?
- 10.) How do superintendents influence communication between state representatives of their school districts and legislators on the education committees of the house or senate?
- 11.) How do superintendents work with superintendent colleagues to influence the development of educational policies?
- 12.) How do superintendents empower local community members in an attempt to influence the development of educational policies?

- 13.) How are the strategies used by superintendents to influence the development of educational policies affected by the timing of legislative sessions?
- 14.) How do superintendents work with the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) to influence the development of educational policies?
- 15.) How do superintendents work with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to influence the development of educational policies?
- 16.) How do superintendents work with the Education Service Centers (ESC's) to influence the development of educational policies?
- 17.) How do superintendents work with their local school board members to influence the development of educational policies?
- 18.) How are superintendents involved in the drafting of new legislation in order to influence the development of educational policies?
- 19.) What methods of communication do superintendents use when contacting legislators when trying to influence the development of educational policies?
- 20.) How are superintendents involved during the various stages of the policy development process?
- 21.) What do superintendents do during the various stages of policy development to influence the process?

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VITA

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